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ASKING AND ANSWERING THE SUBLIME QUESTION

Visions, Views, Vitalities

Guest Editor: Shouvik N. Hore

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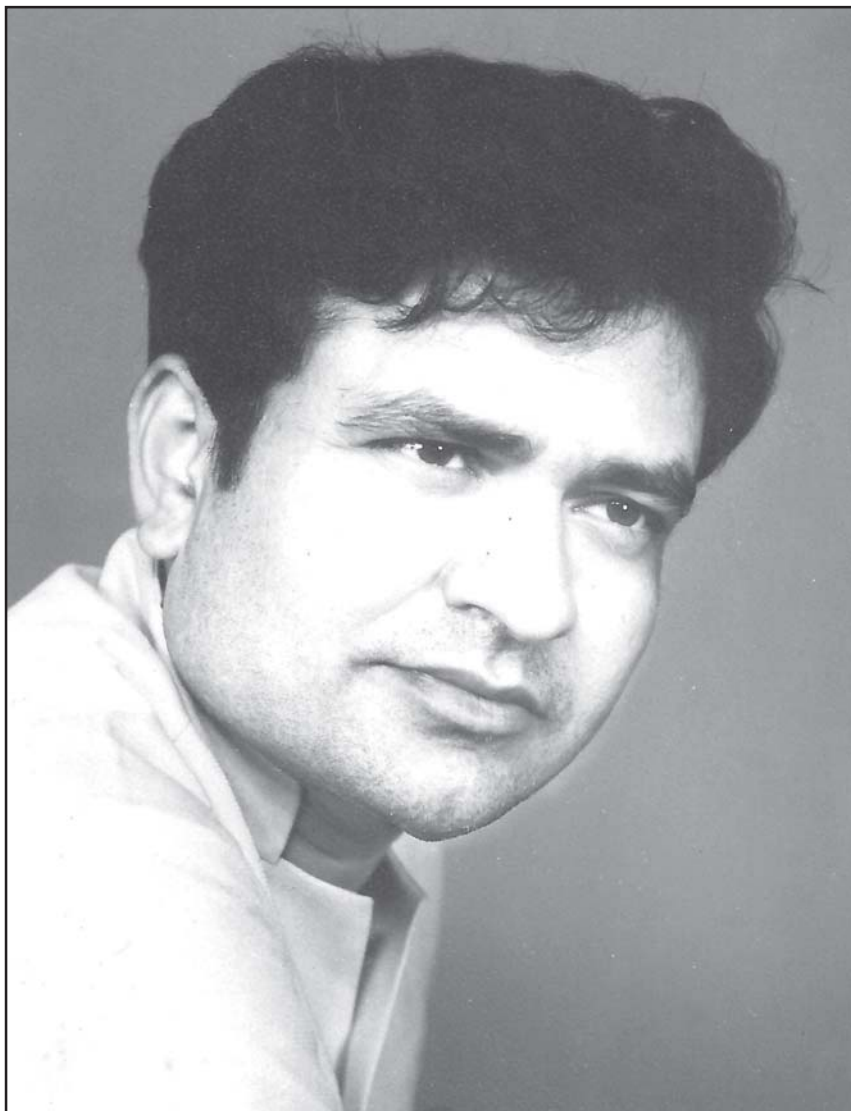
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Prof. Ananta Charan Sukla
(6 Nov 1942 – 30 Sep 2020)



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In Memoriam: Ananta Charan Sukla (1942-2020)

PETER LAMARQUE

His many friends and admirers across the world will be saddened by the death of Ananta Sukla on 30 September 2020, aged 78. Sukla was a polymathic author, scholar and editor who showed extraordinary energy and vision, not only in creating and sustaining an international journal, the *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* (JCLA), but in numerous scholarly projects of his own, covering literature, philosophy and aesthetics, always with a rich, well-informed, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary flair.

Rather than delineate, in the manner of a formal obituary, his many achievements, as editor and scholar, listing his multiple publications and contributions to scholarly life, I will offer instead only some brief personal recollections.

On the few occasions when I had the pleasure of being in Ananta Sukla's company, for example, at meetings of the American Society for Aesthetics, I very soon acquired a lasting impression of his courtesy, kindness, and indeed impressively wide-ranging interests. If these personal encounters were, sadly, all too rare, nevertheless we built up an enduring rapport through many years of correspondence, as he sought my advice and opinions on many of his projects.

When I took over as editor of the *British Journal of Aesthetics* (BJA) in January 1995, Ananta was keen for me to continue the various (in some cases longstanding) reciprocal arrangements between that journal and his *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*. I was more than pleased to oblige. Copies were exchanged and advertisements for JCLA would appear in the BJA. From then on, I was associated with JCLA in different capacities. Ananta very kindly appointed me to his Editorial Board, which was a distinct honour, and to this day I remain a member. Also, it was a particular pleasure and privilege to have an article of mine published in the Silver Jubilee Volume (volume XXV, 2002).

JCLA is a remarkable journal: even its title, juxtaposing 'comparative literature' and 'aesthetics', was unusual and ambitious for its time. The spheres of 'comp lit' and aesthetics had not seen much overlap in the 1970s and 1980s, indeed in some circles there was an undercurrent of suspicion on both sides. But 'comparative literature' for Ananta was not grounded in Critical Theory, or Theory of any kind. He had a far more ecumenical and open-minded conception, literally pursuing comparisons between literature from different cultures, always against the backdrop

of other arts from those cultures. The contents of the journal attest to this enlightened conception, free from theoretical orthodoxy, dogma, or ideology, and encouraging a broad sweep of interests, international in scope, hospitable to a diversity of approaches. And his cast of authors also reflects this international spirit.

Ananta was himself a man of wide intellectual interests and deep knowledge across many fields. I will not comment in detail about his significant publication output—the range of which is well-illustrated just by attending to his book and article titles—but I will remark briefly on one book, a recently edited volume entitled *Fiction and Art: Explorations in Contemporary Theory* (Bloomsbury, 2015). I had a modest input at an early stage of this project when Ananta asked me to recommend some possible contributors. And I was delighted to see it come to fruition. The volume has all the hallmarks of Ananta's ambition, vision, and intellectual curiosity. In lesser hands an edited volume on the theme 'Fiction and Art' might restrict itself to some limited aspects of fictional representation in, say, literature, possibly painting. But Ananta had something far more enterprising in mind, far wider in scope, and of course far more interesting! He offered sections on Historical, Interdisciplinary, Aesthetic, and Oriental Perspectives, with essays on fictions in mathematics, history, the law, and Greek myths; among the arts he included literature, painting, music, dance, theatre, film, and photography; there are also discussions of the semantics and epistemology of fiction; and for good measure there are essays on Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic fictions. His own essay contribution was on 'Fundamentals of Fiction in Indian Mythology, Poetics and Dramaturgy'.

This gives an image of the man himself: tirelessly pursuing topics wherever they might lead, not bound by narrow disciplinary divisions, or indeed cultural or geographical ones. This is admirable and a model for us all in a world where the narrowing of interests is more the norm than the pursuit of knowledge beyond safe cultural and intellectual 'comfort zones'. Ananta Sukla will be greatly missed, and it can only be hoped that his visionary legacy can flourish and be sustained.

University of York, UK

‘Of Aspect more Sublime’: A Foreword

SHOUVIK NARAYAN HORE

In the year 2019, the author of this piece had travelled to Bhutan, a landlocked mountainous nation between two civilizational giants, Greater India and China. His journey commenced on the first week of April, as most tourists and introspective travellers do generally this time of the year. The transit was made from Jaigaon, a town in Bengal (W), through Phuentsholing – a town bordering the previously mentioned Indian town, before winding its way upwards, dissecting the inner Himalayas to the capital city of Thimphu – a distance no less than forty-five miles. It was decided that the journey shall be undertaken between five thirty in the evening and ten at night – a decision that would prove critical as the day began drawing to a close.

As the Car drove out of the bordering Bhutanese town, the driver announced that one shall witness a steep climb for the first fifty kilometres of the journey. While hearing this being said, smoother hills had started to disappear one by one; the river flowing beneath no longer looked like a river. A significant increase in elevation made it look like a meandering thread. Vehicles started fading out of sight, people were not descried, the turns becoming sharper, the climate chillier, the guard-rails nothing compared to the imagined gorges, cascades and dingles that were already assuming gravity in their uninhabited depth as the Sun decided to go down completely at seven.

At this fair moment of sacrilege, the driver, somewhat piteously, turned on his headlights, as the car rattled slowly. In that darkness visible, the author's eyes were fixed upon two things, and two things only; as the headlights flickered, he was staring at the enormous massifs of mountains, rising immediately from the near edges of the road – barren, without any trace of vegetation, of life – huge hunks of rocks hanging loose, and the occasional boulder almost about to plunge, but where? In the unimaginable depth of the dark valleys, where no headlight could offer enough knowledge of its true power of devouring whatever lives. There was a dark vapour rising, a cold breath, not a cold breeze, in the depressing and trembling isolation of the way to the city – the true sensation, the sensation that mortals refer to – the *fear of death*.

Activities had begun happening while this experience continued to weather; city-lights had taken over from the headlights. With the cold having amplified, the *fear of death* had entered into a brief remission, not expanding any further – its turbulence settling slowly, but still operating on the crust of conscience. The night had ended.

The next day took over. The first rays of the Sun shone upon the enormous massifs of the inner Himalayas again for the first time since last night, and instead of gainsaying former experiences, an attempt had begun almost immediately to cognize what had happened without its recumbent fear. The method – an apprehension of its size and power, of its ability to terrify – through introspections, reflections and intellections that had the potential to comprehend the vastness of the object, to reduce it into a capsule, a subject of moral superiority from its apocalyptic inferiority – an attempt to invert the *fear*

of death, born from experience coupled with ignorance, into *death of fear*, born from knowledge and conscientiousness – a spiritual and mental itinerary creating an aspect truly Sublime. While the author would soon descend from the mountain terrains of Bhutan to the sacred plains of India, the methods of revealing, comprehending and generating sublime knowledge from apocalyptic experience continued to war with the human intellect until this day, lingering further on.

The intention here so far has not been to provide a magical key that unlocks the stratagems of the Sublime. Through the narrative strung together by events promoting the conceptual over the visual, two crucial questions have been asked that seek clarifications and not rigid answers – How does one invert the *fear of death* into the *death of fear*? More importantly, does the Sublime question, reared in their cradles, ever comprehend the apocalyptic without answering it perfectly? Assuming that these two questions are ever answered, there would never be another Sublimity, and this anthology and its objective would become fodder for the planktons. Incidentally, two thousand years have passed without an answer that surpasses the rest; hence, calculated risks may be taken, that involves a covenant with the unknown answer, with the properly illustrated questions in place – bold and respectful. This is not the same as saying that the answers to the Sublime question have never been answered through an ambiguous agreement with other forms of aesthetic examinations. To cite one specific example, when Swami Vivekananda describes an incident from the *Mahabharata* involving Yudhisthira in his famous ‘Paper on Hinduism’, he seems to coagulate the ‘grand’ with the ‘beautiful’, using them simultaneously to describe the sublimity of the Himalayas.¹ It does not define a mistake in his eloquence; it gives rise to a genuine contradiction, a working oxymoron of ideas against pleasure, a true ambivalence in the Indian understanding of the Sublime, to be identified by Hegel in *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*.² However, this interesting aspect ascends through the lack of clear-cut distinctions between the symbolic and the natural – something crucial to Western methodologies of the Sublime. Since one lives in a world of interpretations and not hard definitions, is it incumbent upon the individual to appreciate through distinctions only, yet not through an acceptance of honest assimilations by being amused at their fluid co-existences?³ It could preferably be called a *confusement* – an assimilation causing both confusion and amusement without retarding its movement towards a positive reception of the idea and its definitions. If the neologism is pardoned by the patient reader, would it be wrong to claim that in the dialectical (im)balance of the truly grand and the *confusement* that the beautiful transcends into, the stable form of an Indian Sublime can be made to reside?

This is not an answer. This is merely designed as a sincere question on the Sublime – a *true* Sublime question that could be answered – asking and answering the sublime questions. All the essays in this anthology shall remain committed to this purpose, and the establishment of any answer shall only be a virtuous question in which a successor, a researcher of the Sublime might step in and fulfil its visions, views and vitalities.

Notes

¹ *Vivekananda Reader* (Ed. Swami Narasimhananda) Advaita Ashrama, 2012, p. 140.

² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Symbolism and the Sublime”. *The Sublime Reader*. Edited by Robert R. Clewis. Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, pp. 200-211.

³ *Derrida: A Very Short Introduction*. By Simon Glendenning. Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 22.

On the Cusp of the Sublime: Environmental and Artistic Sublimity

NICOLE A. HALL

Abstract

Paradigm cases of the sublime relate to the natural environment. Is the natural environment its only domain, or is it possible to experience the sublime in works of art? I argue that the sublime originates in the natural environment, but that some works of art overcome the difficulty of its non-representational structure and provide indirect access to sublime experience. The sublime is a case in which pleasure's motivational profile may be understood differently from that of beauty. The motivational profile of the sublime in the natural environment is one of perceptual frustration, due to perception's limited capacity for representing it in its entirety. Even as far back as the Longinian tradition, we learn that the artistic sublime finds its source in the natural sublime. I argue that while the sublime originates in the natural environment, the question about whether we experience it in art hinges on the role of the imagination in the experience of the sublime. While it might be thought that experiencing beauty in imagination is less vibrant than experiencing it in perception, I argue that the sublime manifests itself primarily in the imagination, allowing for the possibility of experiencing it in some artworks.

Introduction

Paradigm cases of the sublime relate to the natural environment. Kant writes about "[b]old, overhanging and, as it were threatening cliffs, thunderclouds towering up into the heavens, bringing with them flashes of lightning and crashes of thunder, volcanoes with all their all-destroying violence, hurricanes with the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean set into a rage, a lofty waterfall on a mighty river". He further writes:

But the sight of them only becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is, as long as we find ourselves in safety, and we gladly call these objects sublime because they elevate the strength of our soul above its usual level, and allow us to discover within ourselves a capacity for resistance of quite another kind, which gives us the courage to measure ourselves against the apparent all-powerfulness of nature.¹

The pleasure we derive in our experience of the sublime is in human reason's being separate and free from nature's causal laws, from our capacity to judge the sublime despite its overwhelming force and greatness.

Emily Brady writes about the sublime as a historical concept and carves out a space for its contemporary relevance.² Indeed, its history helps us to re-examine its status in contemporary aesthetic theory and its contribution to explanations about our relation-

ship and ethical engagement with the natural world. Brady gathers the qualities and experiences put forward by Modern philosophers which characterize the sublime in nature and include great height or vastness (including the mathematical sublime), tremendous power (the dynamical sublime) and emotional responses “distinguished by feelings of being overwhelmed – a somewhat anxious experience, but ultimately one that feels exciting and pleasurable”.³ Emphasis is placed on loftiness, greatness and intensity, and strong emotion.

Along similar lines, Robert Clewis writes that “[t]he sublime (or sublimity) is difficult to define, and its meaning has changed over time”, but “can be described as a complex feeling of intense satisfaction, uplift, or elevation, felt before an object or event that is considered to be awe-inspiring”. He further writes that “[a]lthough the sublime is sometimes characterized as a complex combination of satisfying and discomforting elements, it is on the whole a positive and pleasant experience: perceivers typically desire the experience to continue.”⁴

Is the natural environment its only domain, or is it possible to experience the sublime in works of art? I argue that the sublime originates in the natural environment, but that some works of art overcome the difficulty of its non-representational structure, providing indirect access to sublime experience. Experiencing the environmental sublime involves those features which Brady takes to include scale, wildness, disorder and formlessness. Those features are indicative of our relative and subjective smallness compared to the seeming expanse of nature and the universe; the experience is one of immersion that hinges on our perceptual and cognitive limitations, rather than one that necessarily dominates the natural and universal expanse.

Even though it is of a different kind, it would be shortsighted to deny the possibility of artistic sublimity. This would not only deny anecdotal evidence that links the sublime to art through the ages, starting with Longinus, but to deny the *de facto* categories of the sublime. The Tate Gallery lists various research projects on the artistic sublime, for example: the Romantic sublime, the Victorian sublime, the modern sublime, the contemporary sublime. Artists, art critics, art theorists and philosophers have variously thought certain artworks may be sublime. Indeed, even Kant may be read as infusing the experience of fine art with sublimity:

In the experience of the natural (or pure) sublime, incomprehensibly large or mighty objects stagger the imagination and make us aware of an infinity (i.e., a rational idea) that transcends human experience; in the experience of fine art produced by genius, an aesthetic idea stretches our imagination to a point where we become aware of an infinite richness of meaning (i.e. a rational idea) that no conceptualization can fully capture. Both experiences lead us to contemplate rational ideas, which are beyond finite human understanding. This parallelism between genius and the sublime, whereby both direct our awareness towards the idea of infinity, is compelling.⁵

There is ongoing discussion between Uygur Abaci and Clewis on whether Kant thought the artistic sublime was possible.⁶ Ultimately, I disagree with Abaci that the artistic sublime is not possible, just as I disagree with Clewis that experiencing the sublime is merely about perception, in which case the sublime is available to both art and nature. I agree with Brady about the ontological difference between the environmental and artistic sublime, that the original sublime resides in nature. However, without wading into exegetical matters related whether or not the artistic sublime is possible according to Kant, I do think that the artistic sublime is possible. Along these lines, I think that the

artistic sublime can be separated into the philosophical categories (cf. artistic categories) of the sublime as it relates to style and the sublime as it relates to grandeur and infinity tinged both with pleasure and displeasure.

I argue that the imagination plays a central role in the to-ing and fro-ing of attention from external formlessness to inner experience in addition to perception. The pleasure of our experience of the sublime is grounded in the imagination's incapacity to fully represent it, yet we nevertheless have the capacity to grasp it. This capacity to grasp the sublime despite its overwhelming and threatening qualities, constitutes us as moral and reflective subjects when faced with the threat of chaos, danger and destruction.⁷ This *prima facie* seems to indicate a symmetry in our experience of the sublime in the natural environment and our experience of the sublime in art. However, our experience of the sublime in the natural environment is more fundamental in the immediacy with which it reminds us of our place not only in relation to overwhelming, overpowering natural objects, but in relation to the magnitude of the universe. Not only do we feel that it can constitute us as moral and reflective subjects, it reminds us of our smallness and expendability on a scale of vastness incomprehensible to us.⁸

I begin by presenting varieties of the sublime in order to home in on admittedly Western versions that apply to the environment and to art. I then contrast how form (ordinarily related to beauty), anti-form and formlessness (ordinarily related to the sublime) are cognitively processed (or not) before looking at case studies drawn from Richard Serra, Robert Smithson and Olafur Eliasson. *Earthworks* and *Land Art*, I argue, are the closest to achieving the original, environmental sublime. This is because the environmental sublime's formlessness frustrates perception and the imagination such that it fundamentally relates to subjective physical and mental constitutions, our very existence, in a way artworks do not, or do so derivatively.

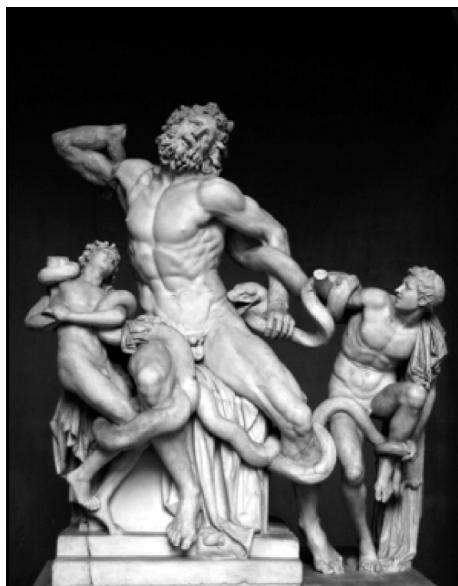
Varieties of the Sublime

Something's being sublime is equivocal between different readings, each of which contributes to a rich possibility of readings. To begin with, cultural and historical variations of the sublime extend beyond the Western framework, with extracts from Bharata-Muni, Guo Xi and Zeami Motokiyo having recently been included in Clewis' recent anthology.⁹ Conversely, in her article on "The Japanese Appreciation of Nature", Yuriko Saito writes that the sublime is not a feature of the Japanese appreciation of nature: "Even when a grand landscape is appreciated, it is not the grandeur or awesome scale of the scene but rather its composition compressed into a compact design that is praised".¹⁰

Clewis' inclusion of ancient and non-Western extracts is welcome, offering contrasts and comparisons that may be made in relation to classically Western conceptions. I will set these approaches aside since in the Bharata-Muni case, it resembles the case of the sublime as an artistic style as advanced by Longinus, for example, below, which I will also be setting aside for the purposes of my argument. Since the environmental sublime as such does not feature in the Japanese appreciation, I also set this aside, even though it would be interesting to explore the perceptual and cognitive divergence between classically Japanese and Western readings of the sublime.

On one classically Western reading, the sublime traditionally relates to literature and rhetoric, but this version of the sublime extends to other artforms, such as painting, sculpture, the theatre, music and opera. Poignancy is central to the combination of form and content in which positive and negative feeling combine to elicit exquisite sentiment.

On Suzanne Guernac's reading, an art of the sublime in Longinus "implies a mixture of nature and art", nature being the origin of artistic genius.¹¹ In literature and rhetoric, the sublime is "a power that springs either from the grandeur of the thought and the nobility of the feeling, or from the splendor of the words or from the harmonious, poignant and vivid turn of phrase".¹² Excellence in writing expresses elevated thought and has come to be known as a style.¹³ However, here again, there is an equivocation between sublimity's being part of the stylistic features of literary or rhetorical discourse and it relating to the external objects represented in literary content. The first identifies a quality of expression and the latter a quality of the represented object, albeit a quality that transcends its represented properties. Longinus, for example, refers to passages in Homer's *Odyssey* in which he describes the heroes and combats of the gods.¹⁴ A similar example is the sublimity that may be found in the anguished, sculptural form and overwhelming emotional content of the *Laocoön*.¹⁵



This version of the sublime, exquisiteness, poignancy, resonates with Wicks' thought that the artistic sublime is possible according to Kant.¹⁶ Here, I take it for granted that stylistic features of literary or rhetorical discourse as related to content form a category of the artistic sublime. I set it aside in order to address more closely the distinction between the artistic and environmental sublime.

On another reading, the sublime may be seen to be connected with politics, for example with Edmund Burke's seminal theory linking it with terror and the passions of pleasure and pain. For Burke, the sublime is grounded in the fear of death and need for social and self-preservation when encountering vastness, infinity, obscurity and power.¹⁷ Here, there are two further equivocations: the first being vastness, infinity, obscurity and power as they relate to the external objects of nature; the second being its close ties with the related concept of awe and violence in revolution that bring us to reflections on the ends of society and self-preservation, as Brady writes.¹⁸ I set this version of the sublime aside, since I am here not concerned with the political dimension of the sublime, but the difference between the environmental sublime and the artistic sublime.

On yet another reading of the sublime, are the qualities that relate it to the natural environment. This is the version I will principally be interested in. Together with his emphasis on the natural environment, Kant brings into focus the dynamical and mathematical sublime. In experiencing the mathematical sublime, we can conceive of the possibility of infinity by means of our mathematical concepts. It is through our aesthetic intuition, however, that we can conceive of the idea of infinity, even though we cannot apprehend it in its full expanse. In experiencing the dynamic sublime, we can be conscious of nature's powerful and violent forces only from a position of distance and safety that enables us to constitute our capacity for judging nature without fear, which includes the judging of natural forces within us. In both cases, we recognize our capacity for reason, our ability to "become conscious of being superior to nature within us and thus also to nature outside us".¹⁹

What is the sublime? Contrasted with beauty, "the sublime is a different matter", writes Iris Murdoch:

As described by Kant, the sublime is not connected with art at all. While the beautiful is an experience of the imagination and the understanding of harmony, the sublime is an experience of the imagination and the reason in conflict. Whereas the beautiful reposes us, the sublime rends us. It is an emotional experience resulting from the defeated yet invigorating attempt of reason to compass the boundlessness and formlessness of nature. Confronted with some vast prospect, the starry sky, or the Alps, the imagination and the senses cannot properly take in what lies before them, that is they cannot satisfy the reason, which demands a total complete ordered picture. Yet in being so defeated the reason gains a fresh sense of its own independence and dignity. Since reason *is* the moral will, the experience of the sublime is a sort of moral experience, that is, an experience of freedom.²⁰

Kant's version of the sublime connects with nature and contributes to his understanding of our place in relation to it, and our status as independent and free, despite our limited perceptual abilities to apprehend it in all its grandeur. As such and given nature's indeterminacy beyond how it appears to us, we are not in the position of having privileged access to it in itself. Nor can we gain knowledge about it except through ideas that are mediated by the limits of our perceptual capacities to apprehend it in its entirety. On this picture, one difference that we might note between aesthetically experiencing nature and art, is that with art we know that it was created by an artist whose intentions, motivations, methods may be known. In all likelihood, artists are themselves limited in their capacity to create a work that is perceptually frustrating on the scale experienced in nature.

The difference between experiencing the sublime in nature, and experiencing the sublime in art will be addressed below, having looked more closely at what it is to experience the sublime, taking into special consideration the difference between form, anti-form and formlessness to make the point that formlessness is the very feature of the environmental sublime that frustrates our perceptual and cognitive mechanisms.

Experiencing the Sublime, Perception and the Imagination

It is useful, as a starting point, to distinguish the sublime from beauty, as Kant himself does. Kant writes:

The most important and intrinsic difference between the sublime and the beautiful, however, is this: that if, as is appropriate, we here consider first only the sublime in nature [...],

natural beauty (the self-sufficient kind) carries with it a purposiveness in its form, through which the object seems as it were to be predetermined for our power of judgment, and thus constitutes an object of satisfaction in itself, whereas that which, without any rationalizing, mere in apprehension, excites in us the feeling of the sublime, may to be sure appear in its form to be contrapurposive for our power of judgment, unsuitable for our faculty of presentation, and as it were doing violence to our imagination, but is nevertheless judged all the more sublime for that.²¹

Natural beauty is predisposed to our perceptual faculties and beautiful objects are discrete objects judged with ease by our perceptual faculties. The natural sublime, on the other hand, is not so predisposed, since it is formless, boundless, disordered and beyond the capacity of our perceptual faculties and defeats reason. Experiencing the sublime is a state of perceptual motivation that negotiates discomforting and satisfying elements, as Clewis notes. It is a somewhat anxious experience, but one that feels exciting and pleasurable, as Brady writes.

However, it is in this moment of perceptual frustration and defeat, it is in the sublime's rendering the limits of perception and reason, that we constitute ourselves as free, independent and moral subjects vulnerable to external sources. How are we to distinguish the perceptual motivation that negotiates the discomforting, anxious, and satisfying, pleasurable elements in our experience of the sublime from our experience of the bounded forms of beauty?

We might start with more contemporary accounts of process fluency in the experience of beauty than that provided by Kant, or indeed Murdoch, to create a contrast with and shed light on the experience of sublimity. This will bring into focus the complexities that emerge from the controversy of whether the sublime is applicable to art.

Recent research in cognitive science informs us that the perpetuation of pleasure in our experience of beauty motivates our attention to beautiful objects, including their non-aesthetic features. "Process fluency" accounts for the idea that our experience of beauty is processed with low effort and at high speed.²² For Jérôme Dokic, for example, process fluency combines with our motivational profile, or self-sustaining attention. Our motivational attention in turn consists in metacognitive feeling and a dual aspect view, in which a positive aesthetic judgment is compatible with unresolved cognitive disfluency. Taken together, these explain the sustained attention we give to beautiful objects. The experience thus consists of both the object's representational features (the features perceived) and subjective features that culminate in and are instantiated at the phenomenological level.

For Dokic, process fluency relates intimately with epistemic, or metacognitive, feelings "subtle affective states that can feed into reliable judgments about a subject's epistemic state, the familiarity and perceptual confidence" they have in relation to an object.²³ The ascription of aesthetic properties, or aesthetic value, to an aesthetic object is dependent on the subject's prior complex of perceptual, and other, knowledge. Aesthetic experience is about the epistemic feeling of 'pleasingness', an aesthetic state of affairs in which fluency is caused by non-aesthetic properties.

Because process fluency does not in itself motivate sustained attention in the aesthetic object, and because artists create works that deliberately frustrate fluency and the feeling of pleasure, Dokic calls for a further stipulation, the "dual-aspect view", in which a positive aesthetic judgment is compatible with unresolved cognitive disfluency. The idea is that both familiarity and novelty are required for sustained attention. This explains

the aesthetic motivational profile that combines pleasure and the sustained attention we have in our experience of aesthetic objects even in the case of objects that are difficult to process immediately.

This contrast between process fluency and disfluency with respect to incongruous objects that are deliberately and perceptually frustrating may be further developed when considering the experience of the sublime in nature. In this case we encounter objects, events or spaces in nature that are formless, awe-inspiring and discomfiting. The experience is nevertheless pleasurable and positive despite its being cognitively disfluent. Dokic's integration of process fluency, metacognitive feeling and the dual-aspect view seem to resonate with accepted accounts of the experience of beauty that find their origins in Kant's articulation. Yet it points to a limit in human experience, when our faculties are confronted with perceptually and cognitively incongruous and overwhelming phenomena and limited in our capacity to process them.

Where beauty is typically associated with form, is perceptually circumscribed, engaged with in perception, the sublime is typically associated with formlessness and is not perceptually circumscribed in perception. The sublime cannot be cognitively integrated or satisfy human reason to the same extent as beauty can: it presents us with limitations that cause us to reflect on those limits, our subjective smallness in relation to grand, vast, incongruous, potentially violent external objects and events. Those limits circumscribe us in such a way that despite our frustration in attempting to make sense of the sublime's boundlessness and formlessness in nature. We introspect, recognize our capacity for reason as moral beings who have independence and dignity, as stated by Murdoch above.

This sort of account might lead to the conclusion that the sublime applies both to art and nature. Indeed, intuition says so: various interpretations of sublimity have populated discourse on art, to include novels, poetry, music, photography, the digital world. It might be thought that the paradox of the sublime applies to art in the way that the paradox of tragedy and the paradox of horror do. The paradox of the sublime might be formulated in two ways. The first is the idea that while it is beyond our cognitive ken, we still experience it despite the limitations of our cognitive powers. The second is the idea that we are at once drawn to sublime experience, want to sustain it, despite not being able to wholly represent it in perception or despite not being able to comprehend it despite its formlessness.²⁴

The idea of 'formlessness' merits unpacking in arguing for the priority of the environmental sublime. The case for prioritizing the natural or environmental sublime, as articulated by Brady, emerges from the consideration of paradigm cases offered in the history of the concept. The original sense of the sublime is thus located in the natural environment and environmental phenomena. The sublime aggregates central, typical features, that include formlessness; greatness or power; disorder and wildness; subjective, physical vulnerability and affect that involves metaphysical and relational qualities.²⁵

Citing architecture, sculpture and land art, Clewis critiques Brady where formlessness is concerned. He writes:

The notion of *formlessness* has to be handled with care. Assuming that every object that we are able to experience has a spatiotemporal form, an experienced object cannot be formless. [...] But once we allow for that, it is no longer clear why artistic objects must be excluded from the set of objects that have apparent formlessness. A similar response can be made of the other features of the paradigmatic sublime.²⁶

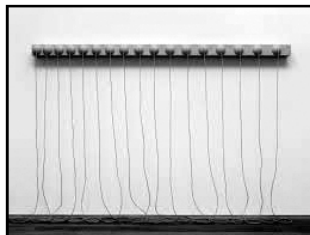
Yet it might be argued that is not just formlessness that makes the sublime identifiable in experience, but the complex of features of which it is a part, including greatness or power, disorder and wildness and subjective vulnerability. It may be that architecture, sculpture and land art push similar perceptual limits, but not to the same extent that the environmental sublime can, given that they do not include all the features Brady identifies as being central to it. The natural and environmental sublime may just belong to a different ontological and metaphysical category. To substantiate these thoughts, let's first take a closer look at formlessness, how it differs from form and anti-form and the distinction I draw between the sublime and the beautiful based on Dokic's integration of process fluency, motivational profile, metacognitive feeling and the dual-aspect view above.

Formlessness might first be contrasted with the nearby concepts of form and anti-form. Form is typically associated with beauty. On a Kantian account, we take pleasure in a beautiful object in perception, in our purposive cognition of it, through the free play of the imagination and understanding. According to Paul Guyer, "Kant equates a beautiful object's form of purposiveness with the 'purposiveness of its form' (§13), understood as a property of the spatiotemporal form of objects narrowly understood."²⁷ The idea of form, as it applies to both art and nature, fits with process fluency: our subjective perceptual powers assimilate the aesthetic object's properties with ease and fluidity and of which we experience pleasure.

The idea of anti-form, or the in-form and formlessness, arose in response to Minimalist, Conceptual artforms that typified early to mid-twentieth century post-Minimalist art in the United States. Anti-form artists worked on creating chance and organic processes which determined the form of their sculptures: the form of their artworks was derived from the qualities of their chosen materials rather than the imposition or creation of order. The emphasis on materials reflected a concern with context, rather than a focus on an artwork's pure form. Their materialism recalls Georges Bataille's valorization of the 'informe', formlessness, where the process of 'making', a concern with the processes of manipulating materials, takes precedence over their constitution into some object.²⁸ Bataille writes:

Thus *formless* is not only an adjective with a certain meaning, but a term serving to deprecate, implying the general demand that everything should have a form. That which it designates has no rights to any sense, and is everywhere crushed under foot like a spider or a worm. For the satisfaction of academics, the universe must take shape. The entirety of philosophy has no other end in view: it puts a frock-coat on that which is, a frock-coat of mathematics.²⁹

Eva Hesse's work in materials such as latex, fiberglass and plastics, is considered as being central to the Anti-Form movement, having participated at the John Gibson Gallery exhibition of the same name in 1968. Examples of her pieces are *Addendum* [1967], a large sculptural wall installation made with seventeen light grey paper mâché hemispheres that are systematically arranged at increasing intervals on a wooden bar coated in the same material.



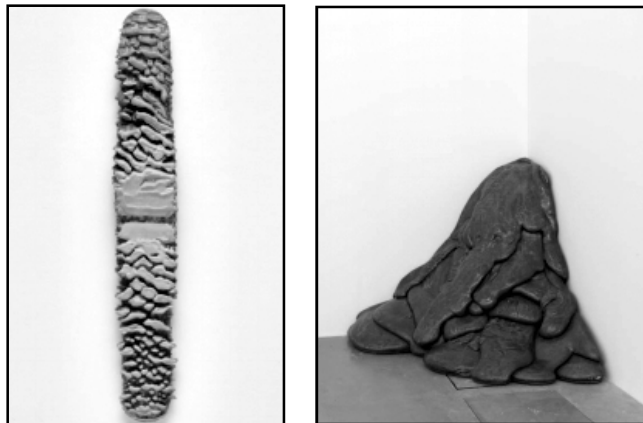
Another piece is *Tomorrow's Apples* [1967], a relief piece in which she uses enamel, gouache, varnish, cord and papier mâché on board.



In an interview with Cindy Nemser for *Artforum* in May 1970, she says:

I am interested in solving an unknown factor of art and an unknown factor of life. For me it's a total image that has to do with me and life. It can't be divorced as an idea or composition or form. I don't believe art can be based on that.³⁰

Lynda Benglis might also be cited as a sculptor and visual artist who made wax paintings and poured latex sculptures. Her works include *Quartered Meteor* [1969, Cast 1975] and *Untitled* [1972].



The former is an iron cast of the form originally made from piled layers of polyurethane foam. The latter is a beeswax, damar resin and pigment piece on wood.

I bring in these accounts of form, anti-form and formlessness as they apply to art alongside artistic sublimity to demonstrate that they are within the purview of Dokic's schema. We have seen that the form of a spatio-temporally located aesthetic object is processed fluently. As a species of incongruous objects, formless or anti-formal works of art slow down perceptual and intellectual cognitive processing. The motivational profile and dual-aspect view kick in, both in self-sustaining attention as we familiarize ourselves with the work, an experience which is ultimately pleasurable. Here, form and

anti-form are perceptually constrained. But what of formlessness as it relates to the artistic and natural sublime?

Dokic discusses Richard Serra's work in the context of the aesthetic motivational profile, in which "our aesthetic experience is *self-sustaining* insofar as it motivates us to *maintain* our cognitive relation (whether perceptual or intellectual or both) to the aesthetic object" and the dual-aspect view, which permits a resistance or delay so that we are "primitively motivated to continue to attend to it".³¹ This explains our sustained attention to incongruous, or formless, aesthetic objects and the role of learning for sustained attention to unfamiliar or non-classically beautiful works of art.



Arc [1980]



The Tilted Arc [1981]

Artworks on the scale Serra's sculptures, such as *Arc* [1980] and *The Tilted Arc* [1981], both made of steel have been described as being sublime.³² *New Yorker* art critic, Peter Schjeldahl, writes that the sublime experience is "beauty combined with something unpleasant", which he attributes to Serra's work:

Apropos the sublime, there's possible unpleasantness galore about Serra's sculpture: gross materiality, bombastic scale, and perhaps the all-time aesthetic quintessence of passive aggression. You can't not think of the artist's willfulness. [...] But [the Tilted Arc] also illustrates, by overbalancing, the dynamic of the sublime – the affront, the seduction – that Serra usually keeps in splendid tension.³³

Patrick McCaughey, art critic writing for the *Times Literary Supplement*, writes the following:

Serra similarly achieves the sublime effect, a consistent hankering in American art from Thomas Cole to Barnett Newman. What makes Serra's sublime so plausible, so truly American is the industrial mode of production; engineering and the machine are vital to its existence. The hard facts of American life and its highest aspirations meet triumphantly in his work.³⁴

In the context of his discussion on process fluency, the motivational profile and dual-aspect view, Dokic describes Serra's work as being 'monumental':

Another example is provided by some of Richard Serra's monumental sculptures, which are slightly tilted. The spectator might feel some incongruity between the vertical orientation of the sculpture as seen and as experienced via her vestibular system. As a result, she might feel mildly anxious, as if the sculpture were going to fall down, although it is not clearly perceived as tilted. This unusual tension is interesting, and might initiate a dynamic aesthetic experience. [...] [T]he low-level tension may eventually be resolved at a higher, conceptual level, and the artwork become slightly boring, but we can still find further interest in the thought that it invites us to go beyond the usual transparency of sensory experience and reflect on the puzzle of our perceptual relation to the world.³⁵

The incongruity that Dokic attributes to the experience of Serra's sculpture relates to the disorientation and destabilization one feels as the brain tries to process information about head positioning, spatial orientation and motion. The experience is thus self-sustaining as we try to maintain our cognitive and bodily relation with it.

Despite this experiential incongruity, Serra's sculpture itself displays form. Indeed, he is often described as a formalist, an artist concerned with material, art as pure form rather than narrative content.³⁶ It is an example of the beauty Schjeldahl identifies with the sublime, and the unpleasantness it invokes in our vestibular system. It is an instance of delayed processing that fits in with Dokic's theory.

One might wonder, however, whether it can properly be called sublime if one of the distinguishing features of the sublime is formlessness in addition to its scale, or its being monumental in size.³⁷ It is not formless, or 'informe', in Bataille's sense or in the sense taken up by the anti-form movement of Hesse and Benglis, which in part was distinguishing itself from Minimalism of which Serra was a representative, since anti-form was preoccupied with working from materials rather than imposing a pre-existing and predefined formalist structure on materials. This is not to deny the disorienting or destabilizing experience we might have of Serra's sculpture, or the slowing down of our cognitive mechanism as we seek to understand works of anti-form exemplified in Hesse and Benglis' works.

Serra's sculpture is not formless in the Kantian sense either, where formlessness in nature is what beautiful form is not. Brady writes, for example:

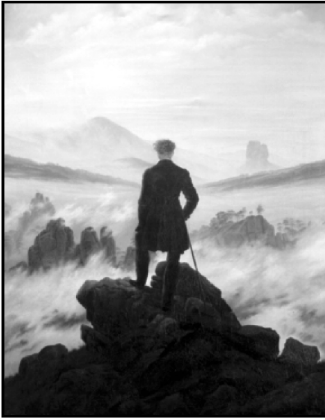
That Kant is so careful to distinguish beautiful form from sublime formlessness suggests the indispensable role played by formlessness in our response. Our response is essentially shaped by the way the appearance of formlessness engages yet finally overwhelms imagination. The aesthetic apprehension of this formlessness is what engages the mind in the particular way that gives rise to displeasure and pleasure, awareness of the ideas of reason, and the judgment of ourselves as sublime. So, even if ungraspable, the appearance of formlessness in a sublime object, arguably, plays just as important a role to the features of natural objects as form does in the beautiful object.³⁸

Indeed, in her recent book on the sublime, Brady identifies scale, wildness and disorder in addition to formlessness. While scale, wildness and disorder might independently feature in some artworks considered to be sublime and some poetry depicts our imaginative capacities in relation to the sublime, it is unclear that any artwork displays the combination of all the features that she has identified as being central to the sublime.

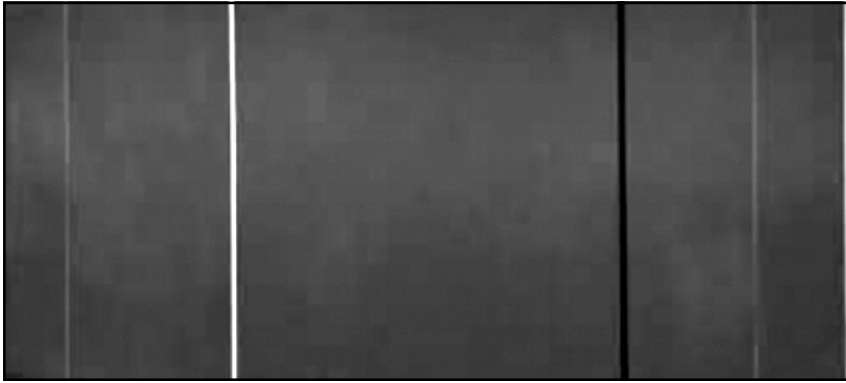
The point here is not to deny the possibility of artistic sublimity in all its manifestations, which ought to be spelled out in different terms from the environmental sublime. Rather, the point is to eventually draw attention to the idea that the environmental sublime transcends Dokic's sophisticated explanation of the perceptual and cognitive processes that typify aesthetic experiences of art, even in cases where aesthetic experience is self-sustaining.

That is to say, the formlessness of the sublime in nature forces introspection and internal imaginative engagement due to perception's limited capacities for engaging with all the features Brady identifies with the environmental sublime. While the artistic sublime can push our perceptual limits and cause vestibular disorientation, artistic intentionality and viewer interpretation provide explanations both for the artwork's structure and for our experience of it. Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine how it would be possible for artworks to be sublime on the scale and with the features presented in the environment given our place in it, rather than the other way around.

Artists active during the Romantic period were inspired by sublime landscapes and typically involved “some great landscape, perhaps with a human subject depicted as a tiny figure amongst nature, or a stormy seascape with a ship tossed around in high seas” as well as dramatic landscapes, to include mountains, waterfalls, canons.³⁹ Caspar David Friedrich is held up as a paradigm with *Wanderer Above the Sea Fog* [1818], although I prefer a similarly inspired, more recent piece by Elina Brothenus, *Der Wanderer* [2004]:



Barnett Newman is held up as a Modernist paradigm of the American Sublime with *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* [1951]⁴⁰:



I agree with Brady that most works of art simply do not possess the scale, formlessness, wildness and disorder of the environmental sublime. Although Serra's sculpture and Newman's paintings have scale, they also have form and order. Although Friedrich and Brothenus depict wildness, they are limited by the medium of painting and photography respectively, constrained by bounded forms.⁴¹

The artworks that have reached the limits of our perceptual capacities in the environmental sublime and seem to meet Brady's criteria are *Earthworks*, *Land Art* or artworks which themselves draw directly from the natural environment. Examples of two such artworks include Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* [1970] and, more recently, Olafur Eliasson's *Ice Watch* [2016], even if for different reasons.



Robert Smithson's Land Art had as its purpose not only to work outside of the confines of the gallery, and more directly in relation to the natural world, but to resist being obfuscated by the abstractions and concepts that were clouding both the land ethic and the artworld.⁴² He wrote that he was for an art that took into account the direct effect of the elements as they exist from day to day apart from representation. This applied to parks, gardens and landscapes that were pictorial in their origins and the aesthetic preserves of Modernism. Smithson was concerned with connecting the formal characteristics of artistic work with the nature of perception and by drawing attention to "infernal regions – slag heaps, strip mines and polluted rivers" about which we are confused and that do not call to mind nostalgia about an idealized past or present.

The *Spiral Jetty*, writes Arthur Danto, "transcends the 'earth art' genre to which critics have consigned it, and has become an emblem of the American sublime". Danto provides the following description, which merits being cited in full:

It is made of black basalt boulders, bulldozed into a straight line that stretches, jetty-like, 1,500 feet from the eastern shore in the upper reaches of the Great Salt Lake, terminating in a spiral with three whorls. From the air it has the look of a bishop's crosier with an unusually ornamental crook. It has a way of disappearing and reappearing, which somehow gives it a touch of magic. Soon after it was made, it was submerged beneath the saline water that gives the lake its name, and on re-emerging at a later time, when the water-level fell, it was covered with a dense patina of salt crystals. It is reached with difficulty, requiring a trek over rutted roads, and there is no guarantee that it will be visible when one gets there; I failed to see it on the two occasions I made the attempt. So the work is as elusive as it is compelling, and though it belongs to its moment in history, it has the timeless air of some ancient monument left behind by a vanished civilization.⁴³

Smithson sought an immediate engagement with the natural environment that would connect us with its metaphysical and imaginative dimension. While most art struggles with the metaphysical dimension of sublime experience combined with scale, wildness and feelings of fear and vulnerability, Smithson succeeds. Smithson himself writes:

As I looked at the site, it reverberated out to the horizons only to suggest an immobile cyclone while flickering light made the entire landscape appear to quake. A dormant earthquake spread into the fluttering stillness, into a spinning sensation without movement. The site was a rotary that enclosed itself in an immense roundness. From that gyrating space emerged the possibility of the *Spiral Jetty*. No ideas, no concepts, no systems, no structures, no abstractions could hold themselves together in the actuality of that evidence.⁴⁴

Remarkable about the *Spiral Jetty* is the direct engagement with the site of the work, sensitivity to what Smithson calls 'abstract geology', where "[o]ne's mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brain waves undermine cliffs of thought, ideas decompose into stones of unknowing, and conceptual crystallizations break apart deposits of gritty reason".⁴⁵ Smithson is playing with metaphors that relate the human mind and existence with the natural environment. He pushes perceptual and embodied experience to limits that may remind us of the sublime, but the spiral, formal, quality of the work are not evocative of the formlessness that the environmental sublime evokes.

This is no criticism of the work, because an artist would have to be able to step outside of themselves and claim domination over nature's own forces. Smithson's work does not seek to dominate nature. While some think that the Kantian sublime "is a feeling of pleasure in the superiority of our reason over nature that involves displeasure", I disagree.⁴⁶ In his chapter on the 'Transcendental Aesthetic' in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant rather articulates a metaphysics of pure sensibility, or intuition to which reason is pursuant.⁴⁷

Our feeling of the sublime in nature is a feeling of inward reason linked both with humility and a recognition and exercise of reason with respect to our actions and our engagement with nature, which is evoked in the *Spiral Jetty*. It captures the imagination and "function[ing] in different ways which become significant for fashioning the character of the sublime response, through expansion and freedom, acts of association, and the admiration which follows from its activity".⁴⁸ Smithson's is not a work of domination over nature through idealism. He writes that nature is "not a condition of the ideal" and does not "proceed in a straight line", but is "sprawling development" that is "never finished".⁴⁹

For his part, Eliasson created an installation, *Ice Watch* [2015], of a circle of icebergs on the Place du Panthéon during the Climate Change COP-21 Conference that took place in Paris in December 2015. Together with geologist Minik Rosing, Eliasson took twelve chunks of free-floating glacial ice from Greenland's Nuuk Fjord and brought them to Paris, where they placed them in a circle in front of the Panthéon, former church dedicated by King Louis the XVth to Saint-Genevieve and current monument housing a crypt for important French historical figures, on Place de Panthéon. The melting of the chunks served as a reminder of global warming, melting polar regions and the current environmental crisis.

The icebergs were moved to Paris⁵⁰ from Nuuk, in Southern Greenland, with the help of Rosing and Kuupik Kleist, the former Prime Minister of Greenland who captained the tugboat carrying the icebergs. The installation played on temporality: both in terms of indicating the passing of geological time through the arrangement of the icebergs in the shape of a clock face and the *in situ* observation of the icebergs melting in 'real' time. Writing for *The New Yorker*, Cynthia Zarin quotes Eliasson:

A circle is like a compass. It leaves navigation to the people who are inside it. It is a mistake to think that the work of art is the circle of ice – it is the space it invents. And it is on a street in Paris – and a street in Paris can't be more important than it right now. We all feel that strongly.⁵¹

Eliasson was keen to "tell the story of climate change" and bring its effects to the heart of a densely populated city, where its inhabitants and visitors could come into direct contact with the harvested ice, feeling it as it melts away. The idea was to "create massive behavioural change" and "emotionalizing data [about climate change] by mak[ing] it

physically tangible".⁵² People were able to stand amongst, touch, lick, feel their warmth relative to the icebergs in addition to hearing the sounds it made as it cracked and popped. The sounds emitted by the melting ice, the released "air bubbles between the snowflakes" and the layered appearance of compressed snow, which had fallen "for tens of thousands of years", activated the imagination's engagement with the formlessness of a different temporal dimension, a temporal dimension seemingly outwith the bounds of perceptual experience proper. Rosing was quoted as saying:

It sounds so beautiful. That is air that was trapped before we started polluting the atmosphere. Those bubbles have almost half the CO₂ content as the air outside the iceberg. It was trapped maybe 10,000 years ago, maybe 100,000, so you can smell what air used to smell like before we polluted it. And you can take a drink of it, beautiful, natural water.⁵³

Eliasson opened up a space in the urban landscape for city-dwellers, surrounded by the administrative, religious, financial and university structures permeated with cultural history, to sensibly enter an imagined time and space reminiscent of nature's grandeur. It connects with what Ronald Hepburn called the 'metaphysical imagination', "which sees or seems to see some disclosure of how the world ultimately is".⁵⁴ We imaginatively experience, by contrast with the familiar urban buildings and landscape, the segments of a polar scene, ice and snow, as revealing something fundamental about how things really, or ultimately are. Through the work's formal and sensorial presentation, the imagination fills up with imagined polar landscapes, the vastness and slowness of geological time relative to time as we ordinarily measure it.

Still, both Smithson and Eliasson function within the remit of Dokic's Kantian conception of aesthetic experience detailed above, since experiencing both works entails self-sustaining attention to incongruous perceptual elements in which we are immersed. It encourages an active cognitive relation to those perceptual elements, affects the vestibular system given their size and immersive qualities. The imagination is central to the experience since it negotiates the dual-aspect of disfluency, or incongruity, and subjective aspects related to the self. This chimes with Brady's view of the interplay between external qualities and the internal constitution of the self in sublime experience.⁵⁵

However, they do not achieve the scale, the immensity and grandeur that is to be found in nature. We know of their intentions and are in direct relation to nature, their form, do not frustrate perception or force the internal imagination to consider our existential state and subjectivities in direct relation to the environment.

Although Dokic does not directly address the sublime as a concept in his article as such, Brady resists the idea that artworks are evocative of the original sublime, which she takes to be the natural, or environmental, sublime. I agree with this assessment for the principal reason that the central qualities, and in particular formlessness, identified by Brady in relation to the environmental sublime undermine the idea that the human mind exceeds nature. Although Berleant ultimately critiques the Kantian sublime, he writes in relation to it:

The boundlessness of the natural world does not just surround us; it assimilates us. Not only are we unable to sense absolute limits in nature; we cannot distance the natural world from ourselves in order to measure and judge it with complete objectivity. Nature exceeds the human mind, not just because of the limits of our present knowledge, not only because of the essentially anthropomorphic character and boundaries of our cognitive process, but by the recognition that the cognitive relation with things is not the exclusive relation or even the highest one we can achieve.⁵⁶

Because the sublime in nature exceeds the human mind and because of the limits of our knowledge, the essentially anthropomorphic character and boundaries of our cognitive process, artists (through no fault of their own) cannot achieve nature's, or indeed the universe's, immensity in its presentation or creative possibilities, in the creation of their artworks. It is *because of* the formlessness and associated criteria of the natural sublime, because the experience has no spatiotemporal form that we turn inwards to discover our subjectivity, our reason, our freedom, our capacity for morality and metaphysical imagination. While we might be able to attribute the sublime to artworks such as Serra's, Smithson's and Eliasson's, or even that of the Romantics, we may only do so in a qualified sense.

Paris, France

Notes

¹ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 144–45.

² Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*; Brady, "Imagination and Freedom in the Kantian Sublime"; Brady, "Reassessing Aesthetic Value of Nature in the Kantian Sublime"; Brady, "The Environmental Sublime."

³ Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 217.

⁴ Clewis, *The Sublime Reader*, 1.

⁵ Wicks, "Kant on Fine Art: Artistic Sublimity Shaped by Beauty," 191.

⁶ Abaci, "Kant's Justified Dismissal of Artistic Sublimity"; Abaci, "Artistic Sublime Revisited: Reply to Robert Clewis"; Clewis, "A Case for Kantian Artistic Sublimity."

⁷ Along these lines, we might be reminded of Sartre's *facticity*. Experiencing the sublime is a salient example of recognizing one's contingency when confronted with *nothingness*, in the face of which we recognize the foundation of the self, one's conscious emergence from unreflective to reflective being or consciousness, the need to reclaim and dominate one's escape into internal reflections, the recognition that we are free, in the end, to make choices. Sartre, *L'être et Le Néant*, 185–206.

⁸ Hepburn, "Knowing (Aesthetically) Where I Am."

⁹ Clewis, *The Sublime Reader*, 44–61.

¹⁰ Saito, "The Japanese Appreciation of Nature," 240.

¹¹ Guernac, "Longinus and the Subject of the Sublime," 277.

¹² Clewis, *The Sublime Reader*, 57.

¹³ Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 10–12.

¹⁴ This example is cited in Brady, 12.

¹⁵ Greenberg, C, "Towards a Newer Laocoon"; Newman, "The Sublime Is Now"; Winckelmann, "Laocoon."

¹⁶ Even though Kant is primarily concerned with nature, he cites the pyramids in Egypt and Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome as examples of the mathematical sublime: "For here there is a feeling of the inadequacy of [the spectator's] imagination for presenting the ideas of a whole, in which the imagination reaches its maximum and, in the effort to extend it, sinks back into itself, but is thereby transported into an emotionally moving satisfaction." Wicks carefully makes the point that "Kant's conception of the sublime is often more appropriate to describe how aesthetic ideas express moral ideas and how we regard works of artistic genius with an attitude of awe and

respect". Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §26, 136; Wicks, "Kant on Fine Art: Artistic Sublimity Shaped by Beauty," 192.

¹⁷ For various discussions on Burke's political sublime see: Binney, "Edmund Burke's Cosmopolitan Aesthetic"; Clewis, *The Sublime Reader*, 78; Hinnant, "Shaftesbury, Burke, and Wollstonecraft"; White, S.K, "Burke on Politics, Aesthetics, and the Dangers of Modernity"; White, "Desperately Seeking Marie? A Response to Linda M.G. Zerilli"; Zerilli, *Signifying Woman: Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke, and Mill*.

¹⁸ Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 22.

¹⁹ Ginsborg, "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology"; Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §28, 147.

²⁰ Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," 249.

²¹ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §23, 129.

²² Reber, Schwarz, and Winkielman, "Processing Fluency and Aesthetic Pleasure: Is Beauty in the Perceiver's Processing Experience?"; Schaeffer, *L'expérience Esthétique*; Dokic, "Aesthetic Experience as Metacognitive Feeling? A Dual-Aspect View."

²³ Dokic, "Aesthetic Experience as Metacognitive Feeling? A Dual-Aspect View."

²⁴ The paradox of the sublime might also be thought to be a near relative of the paradox of horror and the paradox of tragedy, where we are drawn to feelings related to horrific or tragic fictional events.

²⁵ See chapter five in Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*.

²⁶ Clewis, "What's the Big Idea? On Emily Brady's Sublime," 108.

²⁷ *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, xxix.

²⁸ Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory: 1900-2000*, 814.

²⁹ Bataille, "Critical Dictionary," 483.

³⁰ Hesse's aesthetic contextualism coincidentally follows the kind of resistance to austere formalism and is reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir's call for subjective contextualism in the creation of art, in part II of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Nemser, "Eva Hesse Interview with Cindy Nemser." de Beauvoir, *Pour Une Morale de l'Ambiguïté*.

³¹ Dokic, "Aesthetic Experience as Metacognitive Feeling? A Dual-Aspect View," 5, 9.

³² For the purposes of my argument, I will not engage the controversy concerning Serra's work here. For more on this see: Michael Brenson (April 2, 1989). "ART VIEW: The Messy Saga of 'Tilted Arc' Is Far From Over". *The New York Times*.

³³ Schjeldahl, "Richard Serra Will Jolt You Awake."

³⁴ Mccaughey, "Industrial Sublime."

³⁵ Dokic, "Aesthetic Experience as Metacognitive Feeling? A Dual-Aspect View," 10.

³⁶ Formalism was a primary concern of artists and critics of the late 19th and early 20th C. and resisted the idea that artworks necessarily represented reality, preferring to concentrate on the intrinsic properties of materials and form. Richard Serra is an example of an American sculptor who emerged from what Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried considered the evolution of formalism from the Impressionists onwards, a gradual withdrawal from the task of representing reality. See Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried entries in *Art in Theory* and this interview with Richard Serra <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2257kBHggs>

³⁷ Admittedly, Dokic does not use 'sublime' in his text, so he might refute my claims, but this has no bearing on the overall argument I wish to present, which is that the natural or environmental sublime offers the extra dimension of formlessness that differs from the 'anti-form' or 'informe' or Bataille's version of formlessness.

³⁸ Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 75.

³⁹ See chapter 5 in Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*.

⁴⁰ Danto, "Beauty and Sublimity"; Newman, "The Sublime Is Now."

⁴¹ For a more comprehensive list of artworks considered to be sublime, see Brady chapter 5. For cognitive limits on experiencing the sublime in music, see Jérôme Dokic "Pluralisme Esthétique et Expériences Limites" : <https://sublimae.wordpress.com/2020/01/27/jerome-dokic-ehess-ijn-on-pluralisme-esthetique-et-experiences-limites-27-01/>

- ⁴² Smithson, "Cultural Confinement," 133.
- ⁴³ Danto, "The American Sublime."
- ⁴⁴ Danto.
- ⁴⁵ Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind."
- ⁴⁶ Ginsborg, "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology."
- ⁴⁷ Kant, I, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 172–92; Shabel, "The Transcendental Aesthetic."
- ⁴⁸ Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 42.
- ⁴⁹ Smithson, "Cultural Confinement," 132.
- ⁵⁰ The same installation was placed at City Hall Square in Copenhagen in October 2014 and both outside Bloomberg's European Headquarters and the Tate Gallery in London in December 2018.
- ⁵¹ Zarin, "The Artist Who Is Bringing Icebergs to Paris."
- ⁵² Jonze, "Icebergs Ahead! Olafur Eliasson Brings the Frozen Fjord to Britain."
- ⁵³ Jonze.
- ⁵⁴ Hepburn, "Landscape and the Metaphysical Imagination," 191.
- ⁵⁵ Dokic, "Aesthetic Experience as Metacognitive Feeling? A Dual-Aspect View," 9; Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 45.
- ⁵⁶ Berleant, "The Aesthetics of Art and Nature," 236.

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Kantian Sublimity and Supersensible Comfort: A Case for the Mathematical Sublime

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Abstract

Kant's work on the sublimity of aesthetic experience lends itself to puzzlement, if not misclassification. Complicating matters, Kant distinguishes between two kinds of sublimity: respectively, the "mathematical" and "dynamical" sublime. More mystifying is that the sublime is ineffable, beyond the ken of human comprehension. These perplexities notwithstanding, Kant argues that sublime sentiment produces a feeling of supersensible comfort. Commentators identify this comfort emanating most strongly from the dynamical sublime. However, in this paper I draw from the unity of reason thesis to offer a plausible account of how the mathematical sublime is equally capable of providing the same feeling of supersensible comfort.

Keywords: Kant, Sublime, Morality, Feeling, Ideas

I

Immanuel Kant's work on the sublimity of aesthetic experience in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*¹ very easily lends itself to puzzlement, if not misclassification. For example, Jean-François Lyotard writes that Kant refers to sublime sentiment as an equivocal emotion.² However, 'equivocal,' or any of its cognates and synonyms, is not used by Kant in *The Analytic of the Sublime* to describe the nature of sublime feeling. Indeed, 'equivocal' implies an ambiguity that needs to be resolved in the sense of a term that is open to more than one interpretation, in which a term can signify for different things.

Instead of viewing the sublime as equivocal, the conflicting nature of sublime feeling is characterized by, e.g., its being *simultaneously* repulsive and attractive, sorrowful and joyful, and painful and pleasurable. Consequently, in our understanding of Kant's sublime, equivocation is defeated by recognizing the *relation* between seeming opposites, rather than by focusing on the polarities themselves and choosing the correct connotation. Instead, sublime feelings show the form of a necessary conjunction (e.g., *both* threatening and soothing), rather than an equivocation which calls on us to choose between a disjunction, e.g., repulsive *or* attractive, painful *or* pleasurable.

Whereas equivocation would force a choice between disjuncts, e.g., overpowering *or* empowering, if we view the sublime as being characterized by the simultaneity of its conjuncts, i.e., their being in constant opposition (e.g., repulsive *and* attractive), the true character of sublimity is revealed to the human subject. While the subject finds her experience of the sublime constituted by moments of a first conjunct, say, pain, she ultimately finds herself awash in feelings of the second conjunct, e.g., pleasure. The

contradictory structure of the Kantian sublime is not one of sheer incongruity that begs for some form of choice between equivocating disjunctions or which looks forward to a dialectical resolution; for the two sides of the sublime experience are not sublated (*Aufgehoben*) and raised to a higher level.

Readings of the Kantian sublime that take it as exhibiting equivocation or a dialectical relation can perhaps be attributed to Kant's writing that sublimity is "a pleasure that is possible only by means of a displeasure" (KdU 5:260), or as described by Lyotard, "in [the sublime] pleasure derives from pain" (Lyotard, p. 77). The pleasure accompanying the sublime is what Kant calls a "negative pleasure" insofar as "the mind is not just attracted by the object but is alternately always repelled as well, the liking for the sublime contains not so much a positive pleasure as rather admiration and respect" (KdU 5:245).

Kant argues that even though sublimity is ultimately pleasurable, pain or agitation is a *conditio sine qua non* of sublime feeling. The sublime, then, is neither equivocal nor in a dialectical relation which moves toward a sublated third term, but is rather in the relation of *isotension*, wherein, for example, the antagonistic constituents of pain and pleasure are in a condition of constant combination. This antagonism, however, is appreciated by different capacities (sensation and reason), and hence do not cancel each other out. Indeed, the only conceivable "sublation" I can imagine associated with the Kantian sublime is that of the subject herself, who, although feeling overwhelmed, is moved toward a fulfilling experience, namely, as I will argue, to an even stronger feeling of comfort.

Kant accounts for what I have called the *isotensive* structure of the sublime by arguing that while the sublime object is repulsive to the perceptual part of the mind (in sensation), it is attractive to the contemplative side of the mind (in reason). Both sides are therefore necessary constituents of sublimity, and both sides are kept in constant tension, but because reason is for Kant superior to sensibility, the sublime is therefore experienced as pleasurable overall.

In other words, the sublime does not bifurcate the mind; rather, the conflict it causes between reason and sensibility is ultimately harmonious "*for the whole vocation of the mind*" (KdU 5:259). This suggests that sublimity designates and refers to a state of mind, rather than to the objects that cause it. "[T]rue sublimity," Kant writes, "must be sought only in the mind of the judging person and not in the natural object, the judging of which prompts this mental attunement" (KdU 5:256). Rather than being a characteristic of objects in the world, the sublime is a state of mind (KdU 5:256), namely, a form of aesthetic pleasure.

Because what constitutes the sublime is not an external object, "but the attunement that the intellect [gets]" (KdU 5:250 & 5:264), it is an example of minded-ness. The 'minded' nature of the sublime is the subject's *supersensible* experience of pleasure that results from her perceiving extremely large and powerful natural objects. In contradistinction to the beautiful, pleasure in the sublime relates to quantity rather than quality (KdU 5:244). And just as Kant made distinctions between two kinds of beauty (free and adherent, see §16, KdU 5:229), he distinguishes between two kinds of sublimity: the sublimity of infinite size, and the sublimity of infinite power.

II

The sublimity of infinite size Kant calls "the mathematical sublime"; the sublimity of power, "the dynamical sublime". Kant explains that this distinction is grounded in a

more fundamental difference between the two functions of reason: theoretical reason, or what Kant calls ‘the cognitive power,’ and practical reason, which Kant refers to as “the power of desire” (KdU 5:247). However, the Kantian sublime does not belong only to reason, in which case it would not be an aesthetic, but a cognitive experience.

Kant writes that the mathematical sublime is excited by the relationship between the imagination and theoretical reason, while the dynamical sublime results from the relationship between (sensible) desire and practical reason (KdU 5:256). Scholars have expressed concern about these groupings; specifically, that our understanding of their relationship needs to be “properly understood” because Kant’s explication “remains somewhat implicit.”³ The following is an attempt to make their relationship explicit.

Among the many insights offered by Paul de Man about Kant’s aesthetics in a provocative essay, which aimed at correcting a misreading of the role that materiality plays in the third *Critique*, is the admission that Kant’s move into the dynamical sublime is “by no means easy to account for.”⁴ In answer to the interpretive challenges posed by Lyotard and de Man, my account of Kantian sublimity will begin with dynamical sublimity, since it is here that one sees most clearly that the sublime involves a theme that continues to preoccupy modern philosophers, *viz.*, the transcendence of finitude. For the dynamical sublime evokes the idea of infinite power, and of our finding a form of comfort in the world of experience.

We have seen that the dynamical sublime consists in the relationship between sensibility and practical reason. Kant takes this relationship to be *excited* by experiences of extremely powerful natural objects or nature considered as *might* (KdU 5:260). In explicating the nature of this power (*Macht*), Kant cites several examples of the dynamical sublime. These adducements include threatening storms, lightening, volcanoes, hurricanes, and so on (KdU 5:261).

Because each of these natural phenomena can harm an individual, Kant stipulates that the object of the dynamical sublime must not only be powerful but also one of fear. Unfortunately, Kant does not clarify what this fear is, but his ensuing presentation of the immortal God in §28 hints that the possible results of having direct contact with the power of *might* does not exclude the fear of physical harm up to and including death.

However, Kant also insists we cannot actually be afraid of the powerful object, for then we will be incapable of aesthetic contemplation and pleasure. For example, one cannot take pleasure in viewing an erupting volcano if one is in its mouth. “For,” Kant writes, “we flee from the sight of an object that scares us, and it is impossible to like terror that we take seriously” (KdU 5:261).⁵ Furthermore, this means that one cannot find aesthetic pleasure in viewing an object that puts one’s life in actual danger. In other words, the experience of sublimity is possible only when we perceive powerful objects from a safe physical distance. However, recall that we must also feel agitation or pain for the experience to count as sublime; for sublimity, Kant has told us, is pleasure only by means of displeasure. Consequently, Kant argues that the emotional stance necessary for the dynamical sublime is to adopt, if I may employ a play on words from a famous Kantian phrase,⁶ the model of *fearfulness without fear*, i.e., to be fearful before the powerful object *without* being afraid of it (KdU 5:260).

We perform this feat, Kant says, by merely thinking of the danger of *might* through an expansion of the imagination, and we are free to contemplate danger in this way because we are physically safe. De Man characterizes this understanding of *might* as follows:

The threatening power is not something exterior that one confronts directly in an unmediated encounter: it has been transferred, by an act of the mind (sometimes called imagination) into the constitution of an entity, a subject, capable of reflecting upon the threatening power because it partakes of that power without however coinciding with it.⁷

In other words, the fear we experience in the dynamical sublime is not actual fear, but *imagined* fear (KdU 5:269). The sublime operates in the subject or spectator when he is on the *edge* of danger and wonder; indeed, as Kant puts it, the subject is “seized by *amazement* bordering on terror...but, since [the spectator] knows he is safe, this is not actual fear” (KdU 5:269).

This also means that the dynamical sublime calls to mind our finitude as natural, embodied beings. We realize we are physically safe and hence we do not fear for our lives in an immediate way; however, our fear before the imagined danger results precisely from the realization that we are *finite*. In having a sublime experience, we realize that we can die, that death is a real possibility for us, even if we are not in the immediate danger of dying right then.

However, while we are physically safe in the sublime experience, we are not metaphysically comfortable. For even though we know that we will not die as a result of the sublime, sublimity makes us aware of our mortality. However, as I have indicated, the sublime does ultimately leave us comforted in a metaphysical sense. How then, according to Kant, does this happen?

III

To answer this question, we need to explain the unique relationship between reason and sensibility that occurs in an experience of the sublime. When presented with a life-threatening danger, even an imagined one, Kant says that sensibility asserts itself. What Kant means by sensibility here is our desire as embodied individuals for self-preservation. Kant calls attention to the fact that, for instance, when faced with the spectacle of a hurricane our desire for self preservation naturally intensifies because we realize the possibility of death.

However, according to Kant, we find that this impulse is no match for the seeming omnipotence of nature. Nature demands respect, and only a madman or one wishing death would taunt its terrible *might*: for example, consider Shakespeare’s Lear:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
 You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
 Till you have drench’d our steeples, drown’d the cocks!
 You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
 Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
 Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
 Smite flat the thick rotundity o’ the world!⁸

Lear deserves our sympathy, but unlike the mad King, we realize that if our lives were in actual danger we would have no chance to survive; e.g., a category four or five hurricane would kill us no matter how much we asserted ourselves and railed back against its power. Subsequently, we discover, in an acute way, our mortal vulnerability, i.e., our finitude as natural beings; and while our physical death is not imminent in sublimity (because we are in a position of physical safety), we realize the Samaritan Appointment that it is, nonetheless, inevitable.⁹

In the midst of such an awareness of our finitude we become conscious of a “supersensible” side of ourselves, namely, of our rational capacity. While sensibility is repelled by the power of nature that calls to mind the inevitability of death, reason is attracted to the spectacle because it confirms reason’s superiority to nature. This superiority consists in the fact that reason contains supersensible ideas (such as the ideas of God, the soul and immortality) that refer to what Kant calls the thing in itself (*das ding an sich*), which exist independent of nature. By means of the dynamical sublime, Kant writes that “the mind is induced to abandon sensibility and occupy itself with ideas containing a higher purposiveness” (KdU 5:246). In other words, the dynamical sublime allows us to realize that there is an aspect of ourselves that is in touch with something beyond nature and, so, is immune to death and destruction.

However, Kant locates the comforting part of the sublime not in the ideas of God and immortality (the divine), but rather in reason itself, i.e., in the aspect of the mind that *actively thinks* these ideas. Kant writes that “the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation,” namely, the rational being’s capacity to “[obey] a law” (KdU 5:257). Here it is as if reason has been presented with a choice, indeed, with a test or challenge of moral strength. The test is presented in the form of a disjunction: If one’s natural, embodied individuality were subject to danger, would reason succumb to external influence *or* would it rise above such hindrances and reassert its freedom and independence?

If one feels pleasure before the dynamical sublime, then one has chosen the latter. In particular, it is the ability of practical reason to resist the influence of nature and sensibility and instead obey its own law, i.e., to become morally autonomous, that for Kant is evidence of reason’s sovereignty. Thus, reason can take pleasure in imagined finitude because, in Kant’s estimation, the sublime “calls forth [reason’s] strength.... to regard as small the [objects] of our [natural] concerns” (KdU 5:262). We like sublimity, indeed are drawn to the sublime, because it allows us to use the “might of the mind to rise above certain obstacles of sensibility [namely, those of sublimity from which we are physically safe] by means of moral principles” (KdU 5:271). In other words, the dynamical sublime is a form of what Kant defines as the feeling of *moral respect*: reverence for the moral law in opposition to the pull of the sensuous.

Ultimately, for Kant, the sublime is further proof of reason’s rule, its sovereign power. Consequently, Kant locates the comfort provided by the sublime in reason, *viz.* in our divine nature as rational beings. The dynamical sublime comforts us before death by heralding the divinity of reason and announcing its superiority over our natural embodiment. As Kant puts it,

[T]hough the irresistibility of nature’s might makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical impotence, it reveals in us at the same time an ability to judge ourselves independent of nature, and reveals in us a superiority over nature that is the basis of a self-preservation quite different in kind from the one that can be assailed and endangered by nature outside us (KdU 5:261).

The dynamical sublime enables us “to judge nature without fear and to think of our vocation as being sublimely above nature” (KdU 5:264). Winds, cataracts, hurricanes, and lightning may crack our bones and singe our heads, but they cannot crush our supersensible vocation as rational creatures. Thus, Kant defines the dynamical sublime as an aesthetic experience of “nature as a might that has no dominance over us” (KdU 5:260). More fundamentally, nature has no dominion over us because the dynamical

sublime serves as an example of our transcending finitude by having realized our supersensible divine nature.

While the dynamical Sublime is the clearest instance of transcending finitude, a case can be made that the mathematical sublime may also be interpreted as an experience in which we derive feelings of metaphysical comfort. This is no easy task, for the mathematical Sublime consists in the relationship between imagination and *theoretical reason* that is excited, if not daunted, by experiences of extremely large natural objects. How are we to understand this challenge?

Kant argues that the mathematical sublime results when a sensible perception of an object great in size evokes ideas of the “absolutely large;” in other words, “large beyond all comparison” (KdU 5:248) and “a magnitude that is equal only to itself” (KdU 5:250). Thus, the mathematical sublime points toward “what is unbounded in our power of reason, namely, the idea of the absolute whole” (KdU 5:260). To translate Kant’s terms into more ordinary language, the mathematical sublime is evocative of our idea of infinite size.

Kant explains the mental process of mathematical sublimity as evoking awe of the mind, not fear of nature. He states that we are presented with a large natural object that we perceive with our senses, e.g., imagine standing at the foot of the pyramidal Matterhorn, and looking up at its peak, perhaps partially obscured by mist and clouds. One feels engulfed in awe by the seemingly infinite size of the mountain amidst the haze which obscures it, giving the impression of utter formlessness – as though the mountain has no beginning or end. Kant writes that, at this point in the sublime experience, the part of our mind that he names ‘the imagination’ “strives to progress toward infinity” (KdU 5:250).

What Kant means by ‘the imagination’ here is the recollective and combinatory power of the mind; specifically, the capacity to reproduce and keep before one’s mind the contents of consciousness from previous moments. Kant’s use of imagination in this context is something like what we ordinarily mean by the subconscious faculty of re-presenting to oneself objects that are not currently present. However, rather than produce these objects, in this case the imagination simply recalls them from memory. Thus, when the imagination strives to progress toward infinity, it is attempting not only to grasp every part of the object (in Kant’s terms, an “apprehension”), but also to hold it all together (a “comprehension”) in one mental picture (KdU 5:251-52). That is, using our example above, in viewing the colossal Matterhorn we attempt to perceive the whole mountain, which, from our perspective, appears infinite, *all at once*.

Striving to progress toward infinity is nothing other than attempting to hold before one’s mind, in one single intuition, the entirety of the (seemingly infinite) mountain. However, while we are able, perhaps, to look it over until we have seen the entire mountain, by looking, for instance, at different parts of the mountain in succession (first the bottom, then the middle, and so on), we cannot put or hold together, in our minds, a picture of the whole mountain. By the time we have looked at the last part of the mountain, we are no longer capable of retaining an image of the first part. The mountain is simply too large, and our minds are too inadequate for the task (KdU 5:252).

It is important to note that, for Kant, the demand placed upon the imagination to perceive the whole mountain and ‘progress to infinity’ is not coming from the mountain itself; rather, it is *what reason demands*, namely, “absolute totality as a real idea” (KdU 5:250). Reason wants the totality of the object in “one intuition” (KdU 5:254). In other

words, given a *relatively* large empirical object, reason then wants an *absolutely* large one. Reason wants an actual sensible intuition of totality to match its idea of the infinite whole. In this way, Kant writes, “reason makes us unavoidably think of the infinite....as *given in its entirety* (in its totality)” (KdU 5:254). This is because it is reason’s nature to desire the infinite. As Kant puts it,

For we come to realize that nature in space and time [i.e., phenomenal nature] entirely lacks the unconditioned, and hence lacks also the absolute magnitude [i.e., totality] which, after all, even the commonest reason demands” the absolute and the unconditioned (KdU 5:268).

Kant argues that the only way for nature to evoke the idea of infinity is for the imagination to fail at capturing an object’s size. This “fruitless” endeavor is brought to mind negatively because the infinite is presented through “the inadequacy of the imagination” (KdU 5:255), which occurs when reason demands the infinite in one intuition and so inflicts “violence” upon the “inner sense” of imagination (KdU 5:259). As Kant writes in an especially revealing paragraph,

[N]othing that can be an object of the senses is to be called sublime. [What happens is that] our imagination strives to progress toward infinity, while our reason demands absolute totality as a real idea, and so [the imagination,] our power of estimating the magnitude of things in the world of sense, is inadequate to that idea. *Yet this inadequacy itself is the arousal in us of the feeling that we have within us a supersensible power*; and what is absolutely large is not an object of sense, but is the use that judgment makes naturally of certain objects so as to [arouse] this (feeling), and in contrast with that use any other use is small. Hence what is to be called sublime is not the object, but the attunement that the intellect [gets] through a certain presentation that occupies reflective judgment (KdU 5: 250; my italics).

In other words, that reason can even think the infinite, and can, on this basis, demand a sensible experience of it, *is evidence of a supersensible power within the human mind*. Thus, Kant writes that “to be able even to think the infinite as a whole indicates a mental power that surpasses any standard of sense” (KdU 5:254). It is a triumph through failure. Put somewhat differently, the fact that imagination cannot satisfy reason, the fact that, as Kant writes, “all the might of the imagination [is] still inadequate to reason’s ideas” (KdU 5:256), is testimony that reason is sovereign.

The mathematical sublime, according to Kant, “makes intuitable for us the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive powers over the greatest power of sensibility” (KdU 5:257). In this way, reason shows the limitations of the imagination in order to demonstrate its own dominance over sensibility and nature. Subsequently, nature is a means, not an end. Moreover, in an especially important passage, Kant gives credence to my view that the mathematical sublime is capable of offering us metaphysical comfort by writing that in the experience of sublimity, the rational part of the mind uses nature – including the part of humanity (sensibility) that is sunk in with nature – as “an instrument of reason and its ideas” (KdU 5:269) in order to “feel its own sublimity, which lies in its vocation and elevates it even above nature” (KdU 5:262).

Hence, we see that, in his discussion of the mathematical sublime, Kant equates the imagination with the finite, limited, and natural part of the mind. Being sunk in with nature, the mathematical sublime makes us realize “our own limitation...and the inadequacy of our ability” in the presence of “the immensity of nature” (KdU 5:261). The mathematical sublime, however, also reveals imagination and the immensity of nature

both “as vanishing[ly small] in contrast to the ideas of reasons” (KdU 5:257). In other words, like the dynamical sublime, the mathematical sublime is comprised of an awareness of finitude and a feeling of transcendence. The mathematical sublime is not as directly tied to finitude as the dynamical sublime; however, fear before death is not solely tied to our sensuous bodies, but we can experience another fear of loss. This is evidenced by Kant’s remark that, in the mathematical sublime, the imagination perceives the sublime object as “an abyss in which [it] is afraid to lose itself” (KdU 5:258). While the dynamical sublime overwhelms us as physical beings with a sensuous desire for natural self-preservation, the mathematical sublime is perceptually overwhelming, threatening to overtake the boundaries of our perceptual capacities; however, these capacities refer to our physical embodiment, for they are rooted in the world of nature. Hence, we fear being engulfed and swallowed up by the mathematical sublime, much as we fear the absence of limits and contours found in the unending darkness of the night. We are made to realize in both the dynamical and mathematical sublime experiences that we are fragile, small, and finite in relationship to the grandeur of the universe.

Moreover, just as with the dynamical sublime, the mathematical sublime is comprised of the *simultaneous* awareness that there is a part of us which is incomparably greater than even the largest and seemingly infinite natural object. Kant states that “What makes this possible” in the mathematical sublime “is the subject’s own inability uncovers in him *the consciousness of an unlimited ability which is also his*” (KdU 5:259, my italics). We realize that we are finite, that we are not able to perceive infinity (or even objects which are relatively large); however, we also realize that our nature, i.e., our rational nature, is spiritual, for only what is supersensible can think infinity.

IV

The metaphysical ramifications are as follows. The discovery of our divine nature reveals the ontological inferiority of our finite nature. Reason’s idea of the infinite forced the imagination to reveal its own finitude. In this way, our finite nature stands out only against, and only because of, the supremacy of our divine nature. Overcoming death, for example, requires overcoming individuality, for it is only as individuals that we die. Insofar as reason uses sensibility, the sensuous individual is subordinated to the higher level of the supersensuous self – our nature as rational beings.

Along with other commentators, Kirk Pillow’s study of the sublime in Kant states that it is “truly through the dynamic sublime, rather than the mathematical, that Kant links his aesthetic theory to his moral philosophy.”¹⁰ The identification of moral feeling and dynamical sublimity relies on the relationship between the faculties of imagination and *practical* reason (recall that Kant defines the mathematical sublime as a relationship between the imagination and *theoretical* reason; that is, reason as a cognitive and theoretical faculty). And, indeed, we have already seen how the dynamical sublime encounters a test of moral strength and is able to rise above obstacles of sensibility. Moreover, evidentiary support for this dynamically privileged view exists in the literature when Kant states, “Nature is thus sublime in those of its appearances the intuition of which brings with them the idea of its infinity” (KdU 5:255), as well as,

Hence nature is here called sublime [*erhaben*] merely because it elevates [*erhebt*] our imagination, [making] it exhibit those cases where the mind can come to feel its own sublimity, which lies in its vocation and elevates it even above nature (KdU 5:262),

and, furthermore,

The pleasure in the sublime in nature, as a pleasure of contemplation involving subtle reasoning, also lays claim to universal participation, yet already presupposes another feeling, namely that of its supersensible vocation, which, no matter how obscure it might be, has a moral foundation (KdU 5:292).

Understood through these passages, Kant suggests that the dynamical sublime is aligned with an experience of the infinite, of an elevation above nature, and a feeling of supersensible vocation. But what of the mathematical sublime? As shown above, commentators do not usually hold the mathematical sublime as closely aligned with the moral sphere as dynamical sublimity. Is this right, however? I should like to argue that this classificatory pride of place is open to plausible doubt via Kant's thesis of the unity of reason.

The unity of reason thesis argues that practical reason and theoretical reason are one and the same. Kant ascribes to the faculty of reason (*Vernunftvermögen*) an ability to guide itself toward its own goals pursuant to its use in distinctive domains. In its theoretical use, the faculty of reason governs the understanding in the domain of knowledge, and in its practical employment, the faculty of reason is directed at the will in the domain of human action. Because morality deals with the motivations of the will in acting, it is practical, and thus aligned with the dynamical sublime. However, the demarcation between reason in its practical and theoretical employments is less rigid than one would expect, and I wish to exploit this ambiguity for present purposes.¹¹

So, for example, with regard to the relation between hope and happiness in the *Critique of Pure Reason*,¹² the question of hope takes on special, *guiding*, significance because it is "simultaneously practical and theoretical, so that the practical *leads like a clue (als ein Leitfaden)* to a reply to the theoretical question" (KrV A805/B833); namely, as elucidated by Frederick Rauscher, the "determination of our duties...with... determining causal relations and effects, in this case, happiness."¹³

Moreover, the unity of reason thesis receives further support in Kant's *Groundwork of a Metaphysics of Morals*,¹⁴

I require that the critique of a pure practical reason, if it is to be carried through completely, be able at the same time to present the unity of practical with speculative reason in a common principle, *since there can, in the end, be only one and the same reason*, which must be distinguished merely in its application (GMS 4:491: my italics),

as well as in the *Critique of Practical Reason*,¹⁵

[I]f pure reason of itself can be and really is practical, as consciousness of the moral law proves it to be, *it is still only one and the same reason which, whether from a theoretical or a practical perspective, judges according to a priori principles* (KpV 5:121: my italics).

In addition, with specific regard to the postulate ideas of God and the immortality of the soul, which, as we have seen are two supersensible ideas of sublime experience,

Here there is, then, a basis of assent merely *subjective* in comparison to speculative reason, yet valid *objectively* for an equally pure but practical reason—whereby the ideas of God and immortality are provided, by means of the concept of freedom, with objective reality and with an authority, indeed a subjective necessity (a need of pure reason), to assume them. This, however, does not expand reason in its theoretical cognition, but only gives us the possibility [of God and immortality], which previously was only *problem* and here becomes an *assertion*, and thus connects the practical use of reason with the elements of the theoretical use (KpV 5:4-5).

And, finally, in connection to the necessary postulates for the processive, albeit endlessly deferred, production of the highest good (*summum bonum*),

In order to expand a pure cognition *practically*, an *aim* must be given a priori, i.e., a purpose as an object (of the will) that, independently of all theoretical principles, is presented as practically necessary through an imperative determining the will directly (a categorical imperative); and here this is the *highest good*. This [good], however, is not possible unless three theoretical concepts are presupposed (for which, because they are merely] pure rational concepts, no corresponding intuition can be found, and hence, by the theoretical path, no objective reality): viz., freedom, immortality, and God (KpV 5: 134).

In all of these passages, Kant gestures toward what Onora O'Neill identifies as the desideratum that "a successful critique of practical reason should apparently show that there is a single supreme principle for practical and for theoretical reason," which O'Neill believes is the categorical imperative itself.¹⁶

If theoretical reason is one and the same with practical reason in this desired unity, then the mathematical sublime need not be limited to producing a supersensible appreciation of the faculty of reason, but should also lead us to the supreme principle of reason, namely, our capacity to act as autonomous agents with moral vocations.

Subsequently,

- if (i) the mathematical sublime includes a recognition of finitude found in one's sensuous nature,
- in addition to (ii) realizing that our nature, i.e., our rational nature, is divine, for only what is supersensible can think infinity,
- as well as (iii) a simultaneous discovery of the divine aspect of reason,
- and (iv) the desire to side with reason despite the force of the sensuous, as only one capable of morality can,
- then (v) like the dynamical sublime, the mathematical sublime is also a form of comfort by calling to mind moral feeling.

Attesting to this conclusion, Kant introduces this inclusive disjunction,

But it is this idea that is aroused in us when, as we judge an object aesthetically, this judging strains the imagination to its limit, *whether of expansion (mathematically) or of its might over the mind (dynamically)*. The judging strains the imagination because it is based on a feeling that the mind has a vocation that wholly transcends the domain of nature (namely, moral feeling) (KdU 5:268, my italics).

Consequently, it seems plausible that both the mathematical and the dynamical modes give rise to a *moral feeling* which is only possible from an autonomous standpoint that announces its elevated independence from nature, i.e., sublimity.

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Notes

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), henceforth KdU, rather than in Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994). The

latter is interesting in its own right; especially, for Kant's understanding of the terrifying sublime (see pp. 48-53)

- ² Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism" in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 77.
- ³ See, e.g., Jean-François Lyotard, *Lesson on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 118.
- ⁴ Paul de Man, "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant" in *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 74. For a challenge to De Man's reading of Kant's formal materialism in the sublime, see Rodolphe Gasché, "On Mere Sight: A Response to Paul de Man" in *The Textual Sublime: Deconstruction and Its Differences*, eds. Hugh J. Silverman and Gary E. Aylesworth (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 109-115.
- ⁵ The similarities (though not identities) here with Edmund Burke's association of the sublime with danger, pain, and death is also hard to overlook. In *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1844), Burke writes that "[w]hen danger or pain presses too nearly, it is incapable of giving any delight, and is simply terrible" (p. 52). Kant, of course, cites Burke later in §29 (KdU 5:277), but not this passage; neither do Pluhar nor Guyer in their respective editions.
- ⁶ I refer to the phrase, *Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck* or "purposiveness without a purpose" in KdU 5:220.
- ⁷ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 177.
- ⁸ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), Act 3, Sc. 2: 1-7.
- ⁹ The reference is to William Somerset Maugham's retelling of an ancient Babylonian story in his last play *Sheppey* (1933), in which Death relates the ineffectuality of escaping one's fatal end. See W. Somerset Maugham, *Sheppey in Selected Plays* (London: Penguin, 1963). See also the more famous epigraph to John O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra* (New York: Penguin, 2013), p. 3.
- ¹⁰ Kirk Pillow, *Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), p. 73. See also Paul Guyer, *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 185, and Robert Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 2015), p. 249. The common linking of supersensible feeling arising most frequently from the dynamical sublime can be explained by Kant's overwhelming use of nature as manifest examples, which seems to default most naturally to the dynamical sublime. However, as Robert R. Clewis, *The Kantian Sublime and the Revelation of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2009), p. 232, rightly points out, "Mountain ranges, the ocean, and the idea of infinity can evoke either the dynamical or the mathematical sublime, depending on the act of judging. For example, the ocean can be seen as a mirror or as an abyss (KU 5:270)".
- ¹¹ Among others, Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) and Jens Timmermann, "The Unity of Reason: Kantian Perspectives" in *Spheres of Reason*, ed. S. Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) argue that practical and theoretical reason are in equal correspondence.
- ¹² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Henceforth, KrV.
- ¹³ See Frederick Rauscher, *Naturalism and Realism in Kant's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 157.
- ¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, 1997. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Henceforth, GMS.
- ¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Henceforth, KpV.
- ¹⁶ Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 51-52.

Tweaking the Sublime: Translating the Poetics of the Sublime in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

IDA KLITGÅRD

Abstract

This study aims at scrutinising how the notion of the poetics of the sublime in prose might travel in the event of translation. It is a little studied topic, presumably due to the elusiveness of the sublime. Here I nevertheless try to capture this concept by analysing Longinus' treatise *On the Sublime* with a focus on elevated writing. I apply these traits to the three most recent Danish translations of Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* as it is an exemplary novel of sublime passion in both content and style.

Keywords: style, the sublime, literary translation, poetics, Charlotte Brontë

Introduction

The literary sublime is one of our great aesthetic metaphors which cannot be translated into something directly visible or tangible. It is an affective response to meeting something which we invest with the feeling of transcendence. As the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge put it:

I meet, I find the Beautiful - but I give, contribute or rather attribute the Sublime. No object of the Sense is sublime in itself; but only as far as I make it a symbol of some Idea. the circle is a beautiful figure in itself; it becomes sublime, when I contemplate eternity under that figure (Twitchell 21)

The Romantic sublime is a feeling of grandeur, awe and terror of the mind when meeting with typically boundless and terrifying natural landscapes, or with an elevated style of writing which strikes the reader with a mighty power. This sense of the sublime was certainly not unfamiliar to the Victorian novelist Charlotte Brontë in her most famous novel *Jane Eyre* (1847). In fact, the novel's skillful balancing of Victorian Puritanism, Romantic sublimity and Gothic terror has turned it into one of the most loved novels in British literary history. And here I set out to investigate how the notion of the sublime might travel in a translational recreation. If it is such an intangible metaphor of affect, how can it be translated into another language so that the same effect is reached in the target text?

As far as I can see, literature on translations of the sublime from one language into another is hard to find. Perhaps it is due to the elusive nature of the sublime and to the fact that it appears in the eye of the beholder – or the reader. However, some studies have undertaken to discuss translations of literary effects, which the sublime might be categorized as. In Parks (1998), for instance, the travel of the so-called “spirit” of various modernist works into Italian is studied. And such spiritual response, or “aesthetic qualia”, must be maintained in translation and clearly distinguished from rapid emotional

response according to Boase-Beier: "it would seem wrong for a translator to elicit the wrong level of response just as much as to elicit the wrong type of response" (102). Thus, trying to recreate the stylistic trait or poetics of the sublime may be both a constraint and a gift in literary translation in general:

The main challenge to a literary translator is that s/he is expected to operate on both levels: making sure the target surface story matches the source surface story, both in terms of form and content, including dealing with such indeterminable features as 'tone', 'voice' and 'spirit', as well as simultaneously telling a more profound story whose purpose is to touch or move the reader in one way or another (Klitgård 250).

Thus, a translator must render the source style in such a way that the target reader is moved in the same way as the source audience. And in *Jane Eyre*, the sublime is not only expressed in the many striking nature descriptions; it is also a "perceived distinctive manner of expression", which is how we might define "style" broadly speaking (Wales 371). But in order to characterise Brontë's sublime style, we must first turn to the earliest work on the sublime *par excellence* by Longinus as his doctrines reverberate in Charlotte Brontë's writing style.

Passionate writing: Longinus' *On the sublime*

Longinus' treatise on the sublime is an important epistolary piece of Greek aesthetics of oratory and literary criticism dated to the 1st century AD, but not discovered until the 16th century. Together with Edmund Burke's exposition *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* from 1757, Longinus' ideas have had far-reaching impacts on the Romantic notion of the sublime immortalised in much British Romantic poetry. In his essay "The Sublime and the Beautiful" of *The Prelude* (1811-12) William Wordsworth, for instance, contemplates the rugged and infinite scenery of the Langdale Pikes in the Lake District – a scenery which resembles the one I have selected in *Jane Eyre*. The swelling of feelings of power and triumph when facing this natural wonder is the swelling of the sublime in the mind of the beholder (Wordsworth 2). Longinus' notion of the sublime has also had an impact on Gothic fiction, such as in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) in which the idea of the violently passionate sublime is the connection of astonishment, terror and pain with elevation, pleasure and delight. This feeling outmatched the small and the beautiful, and thus writers and artists yearned for the awe of fearful and irregular landscape sceneries, such as the Alps, rocks, abysses, the ocean, craters and mighty waterfalls rather than, say, nicely kempt gardens. And this was a conceit that kept flourishing in Victorian literature as well (Mishra). Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is no exception.

Longinus' treatise is a piece of dos and don'ts of good writing in order to reach sublimity which is defined as a certain loftiness and excellence in language which flashes forth and "scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and at once displays the power of the orator in all its plenitude" (chapter 1)¹. It is the image of greatness of mind which lies deeply within our nature as a constant invincible yearning for something which is greater and more divine than ourselves:

This besides many other things, that Nature has appointed us men to be no base nor ignoble animals; but when she ushers us into life and into the vast universe as into some great assembly, to be as it were spectators of the mighty whole and the keenest aspirants for honour, forthwith she implants in our souls the unconquerable love of whatever is elevated

and more divine than we. Wherefore not even the entire universe suffices for the thought and contemplation within the reach of the human mind, but our imaginations often pass beyond the bounds of space, and if we survey our life on every side and see how much more it everywhere abounds in what is striking, and great, and beautiful, we shall soon discern the purpose of our birth. This is why, but a sort of natural impulse, we admire not the small streams, useful and pellucid though they may be, but the Nile, the Danube or the Rhine, and still more the Ocean. Nor do we view the tiny flame of our own kindling (guarded in lasting purity as its light over is) with greater awe than the celestial fires though they are often shrouded in darkness; nor do we deem it a greater marvel than the craters of Etna, whose eruptions throw up stones from its depths and great masses of rock, and at times pour forth rivers of that pure and unmixed subterranean fire (Chapter 35).

This passionate yearning for the elevation of mind can be masterly expressed through instruction and controlled by reason. To Longinus, sublimity and passion are not a unity, but a necessary disunity: "For some passions are found which are far removed from sublimity and are of a lower order, such as pity, grief and fear; and on the other hand are many examples of the sublime which are independent of passion, such as the daring words of Homer" (chapter 8). Passion has to surpass the limits of the human imagination to be authentically sublime: "there is no tone so lofty as that of genuine passion, in its right place, when it bursts out in a wild gust and mad enthusiasm and as it were fills the speaker's words with frenzy" (chapter 8).

So how does the writer succeed in being authentically passionate and great? Besides having the required gift of discourse, Longinus dictates five principal sources of elevated language. The first two sources are natural gifts, whereas the remaining three are the gifts of artistic instruction: The first natural gift is the power of forming great conceptions which comes natural to "the proudest spirits" (chapter 9). The second gift is the capacity of vehement and inspired passion, as exemplified in Sappho: "the skill with which she selects and binds together the most striking and vehement circumstances of passion" (Chapter 9). She holds the power of forming one body of various contrasting ideas, such as hot and cold, the senses and the mind, in such a way that "The effect desired is that not one passion only should be seen in her, but a concourse of the passions" (chapter 9). The first gift of artistic instruction is the due and natural formation of figures of bulkiness such as amplification, asyndeton, anaphora, diatypsis, hyperbaton, polyptoton and periphrasis (chapters 1-15). The second gift is noble diction which is divided into a) choice of words, b) use of metaphors and c) elaboration of language. The proper time for metaphors, for example, "is when the passions roll like a torrent and sweep a multitude of them down their resistless flood" (chapter 32). The number of metaphors is irrelevant "For it is the nature of the passions, in their vehement rush, to sweep and thrust everything before them, or rather to demand hazardous turns as altogether indispensable. They do not allow the hearer leisure to criticize the number of the metaphors because he is carried away by the fervour of the speaker" (chapter 32). The last gift of artistic instruction is that of dignified and elevated composition. When elements of a passage are joined in a harmonious arrangement, they form a full and perfect organic whole leading to a dignified stateliness of "rotundity; and in periods sublimity is, as it were, a contribution made by multiplicity". This feeling of vast unity makes the listener share the passions of the speaker (chapter 40).

Longinus has been accused of "repetitions and glancing analogies", which endanger his credibility (Hertz 4). The analogy to Sappho, for example, is used to explain the selection and ordering of material, but it is intertwined with allusions to Socrates and

Homer to such an extent, that the analogy seems merely “wishful or glib” (Hertz 7). Thus, Longinus’ own rhetoric seems pervaded by pathos, rather than logos, which damages his ethos. Also, a hierarchy of natural versus instructed artfulness is gradually formed in his ideas suggesting that the desired authenticity is a concept with modification. In this way the sublime passion Longinus so passionately wants to convey, sublimates the line of reason of the treatise.

Longinus’ principles are built on what is natural and what is learned, what is right and what is wrong, the true and the false (Hertz 17). This becomes apparent when he explains what the writer should avoid, such as bombastic, inflated and high-flown language which discloses the speaker’s weakness and dryness in trying to be more elevated than he actually is (chapter 3). So-called “puerility” must also be shunned. Here the writer aiming at the elaborate may drift into the tawdry and affected (chapter 3). Finally, fake and empty passion must be avoided, as when a speaker displays an out-of-place false sentiment which is purely personal and has nothing to do with the subject (chapter 3). Emphatically, Longinus elaborates on how the sublime can be controlled and mastered which, paradoxically, departs from the powerful authenticity and immediacy of the sublime.

In total, the sublime style advocated by Longinus represents a magnitude and power of mind, emotion and language – in both dimension and number – to such an extent that the sum of the many traits forms an elevated concordant organism which lifts us up to that which is greater than ourselves. And this is not necessarily an inherent quality in the writer as it can be learnt and controlled.

Sublime Style in *Jane Eyre*

The sublime pervades *Jane Eyre*, too, as there are many common denominators with Longinus’ dicta which I will review in the following.

Without a doubt, the novel forms great conceptions of how to merge larger-than-life universal dichotomies, such as Victorian reason and Romantic passion, independence and marriage, norms and self-fulfillment. Terry Eagleton regards *Jane Eyre* as “an extraordinarily contradictory amalgam of smoldering rebelliousness and prim conventionalism, gushing Romantic fantasy and canny hard-headedness, quivering sensitivity and blunt rationality” (16). This grandeur is expressed through the writing style as it complements the novel’s content as well as structure (Brennan 15). The elevated style is for instance traceable in the at the time rare combination between poetry and prose (Peters 162). Thus, stately speech may come naturally to the proudest spirits, as Longinus noted.

As for the requirement of vehement and inspired passion, again, without a doubt, we have come to the right work of art. And as with Sappho, lauded by Longinus, Charlotte Brontë, too, manages to form one body of contrasting ideas, such as hot and cold, fire and ice, the senses and the mind – as suggested by Longinus – in such a way that all the passions merge in a concourse of passions. We see this in all the passages with Jane’s tormented mind and burning feelings, often hooked up in imaginative ways of introducing the natural elements and particularly the symbolism of fire and ice which amplify the sense of conflict in Jane’s *Bildung*. This pervasive passionate tone leaves little room for “middle ground”. Jane’s responses are typically “intense, and vividly penned in violent and emphatic language” (Brennan 17). That is, her reactions are taken to be natural outbursts inspired by the occasion, as Longinus puts it, and not consciously studied to such a degree that they end up in affected frigidity or as false sentiment.

The desired formation of figures in sublime language follows to some degree Longinus' suggestions. The figures of bulkiness shine forth through the very amplification of intense passages, often expressed through a heavily used conceit. Cries of passion are not brief, but emphatically prolonged and elaborate. An example is Jane's questioning of Rochester after having discovered the existence of Bertha (chapter 27). This is not a brief, concise dialogue, but an enlarged, almost hyperbolic, cross-examination whose vocabulary resembles that of a courtroom trial (Brennan 17).

A quintessential feature of *Jane Eyre* is also the noble diction required by Longinus. He mentions vehement torrents of metaphors, which we especially see in the novel's emblematic use of the passion/fire motif, and ornamental language, which we see in for instance the lyrical qualities of this passage in which Jane rejects marrying Rochester:

'This life,' said I at last, 'is hell: this is the air — those are the sounds of the bottomless pit! I have a right to deliver myself from it if I can. The sufferings of this mortal state will leave me with the heavy flesh that now cumbers my soul. Of the fanatic's burning eternity I have no fear: there is not a future state worse than this present one — let me break away, and go home to God!' (chapter 27).²

Then we have reached Longinus' conclusive level of dignified and elevated composition ideally forming a perfectly harmoniously united organism leading to a dignified stateliness, or sublime "rotundity". Here I would like to suggest that Brontë is very much on a par with this aesthetic vision. Jane's voice is "unfailingly honest" (Roberts 50) and particularly insistent and persuasive which draws us into the story (Brennan 23). Thus, it is suggested, Charlotte Brontë refrains from falling into the pitfalls of bombastic puerility and false sentiment. As Virginia Woolf puts it in her essay "'Jane Eyre' and 'Wuthering Heights'":

The writer has us by the hand, forces us along her road, makes us see what she sees, never leaves us for a moment or allows us to forget her. At the end we are steeped through and through with the genius, the vehemence, the indignation of Charlotte Brontë [...] It is there that she takes her seat; it is the red and fitful glow of the heart's fire which illumines her page" [The Brontë sisters] seized those aspects of the earth which were most akin to what they themselves felt or imputed to their characters, and so their storms, their moors, their lovely spaces of summer weather are not ornaments applied to decorate a dull page or display the writer's powers of observation — they carry on the emotion and light up the meaning of the book (Woolf, 1916).

There is in fact a powerful concord between the elevated style of writing and the passionate confidential contents and dramatic structure of the book giving the work a "polyphonic and multi-layered quality" (Brennan 25) which is highly startling, gripping and enriching – and thus persuasive. And this reflects the very conclusion to the novel and Jane's hardships: "All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character — perfect concord is the result" (chapter 38). And this "concord" is exactly the word used in the English translation of Longinus' sublime.

Translation Analysis

Even though several Danish translations of *Jane Eyre* have been published since 1850, I have decided to select the three most recent translations. One by Aslaug Mikkelsen (AM) in 1971 and two translations by Christiane Rohde (CR) in 2015 and Luise Hemmer Pihl (LP) in 2016. The first translation is interesting as it proves to be an abridged version. The

second translator, Christiane Rohde, is in fact an actress, not someone educated in languages or literature, and Luise Hemmer Pihl's translation is printed in her own small private publishing house. We are thus not dealing with big established translators of British fiction in Denmark.

Methodologically, my analysis will scrutinise a selected passage in the three translations in order to hopefully catch the sublime. And even though the sublime is a metaphor, an affective response, whose manifestation in a translation would be best examined in a large-scale audience response study, I here limit myself to a case observation evaluated by myself only. I humbly try to break ground for further studies in the translation of the sublime. Back-translations will be provided to ease the understanding of Danish.

Translating Sublime Landscapes

Passages with painterly sublime landscape echo Jane Eyre's noble spirit longing for greatness. I have selected a passage that not only describes a prototypical Romantic sublime scenery, but also explicitly expresses the vehement and inspired torrents of passion explained by Longinus above. When watching such a scenery "our imaginations often pass beyond the bounds of space", he said (chapter 35). And this is exactly what happens to Jane in this passage. It simply encapsulates the great conceptions of Charlotte Brontë's elevated composition in which a harmonious concourse of the passions presents itself as an organic whole:

I discovered, too, that a great pleasure, an enjoyment which the horizon only bounded, lay all outside the high and spike-guarded walls of our garden: this pleasure consisted in prospect of noble summits girdling a great hill-hollow, rich in verdure and shadow; in a bright beck, full of dark stones and sparkling eddies. How different had this scene looked when I viewed it laid out beneath the iron sky of winter, stiffened in frost, shrouded with snow!—when mists as chill as death wandered to the impulse of east winds along those purple peaks, and rolled down "ing" and holm till they blended with the frozen fog of the beck! That beck itself was then a torrent, turbid and curbless: it tore asunder the wood, and sent a raving sound through the air, often thickened with wild rain or whirling sleet; and for the forest on its banks, that showed only ranks of skeletons. (Chapter 9)

This panorama is of sublime nature as brightness contrasts with darkness, warmth with coldness, and roaring sound with stillness. It is a scene of both instant and recalled nobility and richness which appear awe-inspiring to Jane and heightens her inner state of turmoil. Besides a downright sublime word and phrase choice ("noble summits") and reference to Longinus' preference for torrents of passion rather than small streams, the passage contains a number of alliterations ("girdling" and "great"; "hill-hollow"; "bright beck"; "stiffened in frost"; "shrouded with snow"; "purple peaks"; "frozen fog") and assonance ("turbid and curbless"). Moreover, there are images of ghosts ("mists as chill as death wandered to the impulse of east winds"), skeletons ("ranks of skeletons") and corpses ("stiffened in frost, shrouded with snow"). These are the three translations:

AM: På disse ture opdagede jeg også de glæder, som lå uden for den høje havemur og kun begrænsedes af horisonten: udsigten til de stolte tinder, der indrammede en bjergdal med yppige grønne skråninger, skyggefule pletter og en klar bæk, fuld af mørke sten og lysende krusninger (62)

AM only translates the first four lines and normalises the poetic flow. It can be back-translated into: 'On these trips I also discovered the pleasures which were situated outside

the high garden wall and were only limited by the horizon: the view to the proud summits, which framed a hill-valley with luscious green slopes, shadowy spots, and a clear beck, full of dark stones and sparkling eddies'. In this way, AM deprives the scene of its mighty sublimity of contrasts, vastness and death. The landscape is on the contrary represented as a picturesque fairytale land.

Now I turn to CR's translation:

CR: Jeg opdagede også, at en stor glæde og fornøjelse, som horisonten bare begrænsede, lå uden for de høje pigbesatte havemure. Denne glæde bestod i en udsigt til stolte bjergtinder, der omkransede en dal med grønne skrænter, skyggefulde græspletter og en lysende bæk fuld af sorte sten og glitrende hvirvler. Hvor forskelligt havde dette sceneri ikke taget sig ud, da jeg så det under vinterens mørke, tunge himmel, stivnet i frost, dækket af sne! Når disen, kold som døden, pisket af østenvinden vandrede over disse rødviolette tinder og rullede ned over engene og dalen, til den forenede sig med bækkens dampende frostdåge! Selve bækken var om vinteren en fos, grumset og utæmmet. Den rev træer i stykker og sendte en brølede lyd gennem luften, tit tyknet af piskende regn og hvirvlende slud, og de overlevende træer stod som skeletter langs dens bredder (87-88)

First, as it is impossible to render the same alliterations and assonance in Danish, a few permutations have been included as we now have alliterations in "sorte sten" [black stones] and "stivnet i frost" [stiffened in frost].

But more interestingly, CR's translation is just as dramatic as Brontë's text, but perhaps mostly due to the liberties she has taken in trying to generate the vivid imagery. In for instance the sentence with the chilled mists wandering to the impulse of the east wind, CR translates "to the impulse of" into "pisket af" [whipped by] which is stronger than an impetus or force. Thus, the death imagery is enlarged into connotations of slavery or hell.

The same is the case with the mists blending with "the frozen fog of the beck" which turns into the more dynamic "bækkens dampende frostdåge" [the steaming frost fog of the beck]. And the torrent is "turbid and curbless", that is opaque and without curbs, but in this Danish version it is opaque and "utæmmet" [untamed], that is 'wild'. Again, this adds another layer of wild nature to the original text.

And, eventually, when representing the torrent tearing the entire wood asunder, where the reader can almost visualise from a bird's eye view a gigantic cut down through the middle of the wood, CR translates it into "Den rev træer i stykker" [it tore trees asunder] which is diminishing the damages. CR also turns the forest on the banks of the beck in the last lines into "de overlevende træer" [the surviving trees] which elaborates on her representation of singular torn trees rather than the entire wood.

LP: Jeg opdagede også, at en større glæde, en nydelse, som kun horisonten afgrænsede, lå hele vejen rundt uden for havens høje mure med deres pigge. Denne glæde bestod af udsigten til de ædle bjergtoppe, der omgav en stor hulning i bakkerne, rig på grønne vækster og skygge, af en klar bæk, fuld af mørke sten og glitrende hvirvler. Hvor helt anderledes havde dette sceneri taget sig ud, mens jeg så det udbredt under vinterens jernhimmel, stivnet af frost, ligsvøbt i sne! – da tåger så kolde som døden vandrede langs disse purpurfarvede toppe på tilskyndelse af østenvinde og rullede ned ad græsbevoksede bakkeskråninger og enge, til de blandede sig med den frosne tåge over bækken! Dengang var bækken selv en rivende strøm, grumset og utøjlet; den rev skoven itu og sendte en rasende, vanvittig lyd gennem luften ofte fortættet af vild regn eller hvirvlende slud, og hvad skoven ved dens bredde angik, fremviste den kun rækker af skeletter (88-89).

LP is truer to the formal features of Brontë's style. For example, when it comes to the lyrical "great hill-hollow", where it just might have said "valley", LP has "en stor hulning i bakkerne" [a great hollow in the hills]. Here AM has the more mundane "bjergdal" [hill valley], and CR plainly says "dal" [valley].

As far as the metaphoric "iron sky of winter" is concerned, LP is the only one to translate it into the equivalent "jernhimmel" [iron sky], as CR domesticates it into "mørke, tunge Himmel" [dark, heavy sky].

LP also maintains the wanderings of the mists on the impetus of the east wind [på tilskyndelse af] rather than adding another metaphor of whipping.

Lastly, LP can, however, not resist laying the metaphoricity bare in the phrase "shrouded in snow" which reads "ligsvøbt i sne" [wrapped for burial in snow], and in "curbless" which becomes "utøjlet" [untamed]. And when it comes to the "raving sound", LP translates it into "vanvittige lyd", which refers to raving in the sense of raving mad, crazy. This may be uncalled for at this point, but on the other hand, it may spark off a pointer to the significance of the raving mad woman in the attic later in the novel.

Conclusion

The sublime is an affective response to an experience which gives rise to the feeling of transcendence. It is a notion of grandeur, awe and terror of the mind which may be represented in the literary writing style or in the content and scenery of the story. And it is the translator's task to recreate such "aesthetic qualia" in the transformation from one language to another.

The three most recent Danish translators of *Jane Eyre* immerse themselves in different, but less dramatic ways. Aslaug Mikkelsen simply deletes significant passages of the sublime; Christiane Rohde takes some liberties as she elaborates on metaphors; and Luise Hemmer Pihl tries to stay as close to Brontë's diction as possible, but not without some liberties in emphasizing certain points. Longinus said that the proper time for metaphors "is when the passions roll like a torrent and sweep a multitude of them down their resistless flood" (chapter 32). But if you overdo this, he warned us, you may end up more elevated than is necessary, or you risk puerile learned trifling and false sentiment.

Thus, translating the poetics of the sublime may be both an impediment and a reward as deflating the noble diction of the sublime in some passages and then re-inflating it in others is a controlled tweaking of the sublime which was strongly opposed by Longinus. But from a Danish reader-oriented point of view, this may not be a problem if the reader is unable to compare the original with the Danish version. What the translator can hope for is to have created a work of art that instills in the reader an affective response that attributes the sublime to this novel.

Notes

¹ All references to Longinus will be to this online version: https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/l/longinus/on_the_sublime/

² All references to *Jane Eyre* will be to the Gutenberg online version available at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1260/1260-h/1260-h.htm>.

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Society and Spectacle: The Sublimation of Reality in Baroque Aesthetics

ISAAC JOSLIN

Abstract

This article takes a trans-historical approach to the notion of a baroque aesthetic as the expression of a particular set of societal and cultural circumstances. Drawing on the works of French philosophers, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Christine Buci-Glucksmann, a baroque épistèmè is characterized in terms of the suspension of reason or reality through various representational ambiguities, highlighting the tension between being and appearing (*être et paraître*). Concluding with an invocation of Guy Debord's *La Société du spectacle*, the above outlined perspective contributes to an understanding of contemporary representational practices in order to elucidate a sublime baroque madness that results from the suspension of certainties.

Keywords: Sublime, Baroque, Spectacle, Madness, Reason

In *Culture of the Baroque* (*La cultura del Barroco*, 1975), José Antonio Maravall discusses the baroque specifically as a “concept of epoch,” stating: “[b]aroque culture emerged not from influences or character but from the historical situation” (13).¹ He identifies this historical situation in Spain specifically as an “epoch of interesting contrasts,” and although he describes the baroque as “having its center of greater intensity and fuller significance between 1605 and 1650” (4), he identifies a longer “baroque century [that] was a long period of a profound social crisis [of which t]he result is conflict, or rather, a generalized situation that we can designate as *conflictive*” (19-20). There is undoubtedly an interesting historical phenomenon underlying the perceived tension between the classicality and relative baroqueism of artistic expressions from the broader Early Modern period, and Vuillemin states: “Dans la multiplicité de ses manifestations esthétiques, le ‘baroque’ trahit une mentalité, dessine l’image anamorphique d’une sensibilité” (20). The anamorphic image of a mentality or mindset depicted by baroque art is inextricably tied to an acute consciousness of social, material, ideological, and historical circumstances. Based on the recognition of a “general crisis of society” that marks the baroque period, Maravall attributes determining characteristics of particular “*mentalités*” of the baroque epoch to a variety of fields in a complex social matrix. He states:

It is in this way that the crisis economy, monetary upheavals, credit insecurity, economic wars, and (along with this) the strengthening of seigniorial agrarian landholdings and the growing impoverishment of the masses foster a feeling of being threatened and of instability in one's personal and social life, a feeling that is held in control by the imposing forces of repression that underlie the dramatic gesticulation of the baroque human being and permit us the use of such a name (6).

Although Maravall is writing with regard to the specificities of the baroque in Spain, the general baroque character that he describes—the material crises motivated by ideological conflicts between the Protestant Reformation and the reactionary Counter-Reformation, as well as conflicts between faith and scientific reason, Ancient and Modern ideals, for example, even the disjuncture between the world and its image—existed in more or less distinct material and historical manifestations in all countries of Western Europe, and beyond.² We see in Maravall's depiction the specific socio-cultural factors of an epoch that set the stage for a baroque *mentalité* or "sensibility" which is revealed in the diverse aesthetic manifestations of the baroque. The specific divergences, discords, and dissonances that brought about the breakdown of classical reason and the subsequent baroque conglomerate consist of an ensemble of economic, political, theological, and epistemological shifts, which engendered the precarious condition of uncertainty or "undecidability" that is hallmark state of the "baroque human being." Thus, Maravall remarks, "[t]he gruesomeness, violence, and cruelty so evident in baroque art were rooted in that pessimistic conception of the human being and of the world and which they, in turn, reinforced" (162). From this depiction of the baroque, one can glimpse the interplay between art and life, reality and representation, the kind of theatricalization of existence that might, depending on one's perspective, be considered at the same time either "classical" or "baroque."³

In this regard, the baroque mind is a reflection of the overall instability and temporality of baroque *being*. Thus, the baroque is only a "transition" or a temporary state in the non-linear sense that, whether for a long or short historical time span, is constantly unfolding and folding under the implicit and contrary notion of a classical stabilizing repression.

Marshall Brown summarizes Wölfflin's "cyclical view" of art history, which focuses on a single transformation, that of a flowering Renaissance classicism into "the late style of the baroque, which is initially seen as classicism gone to seed and in later writings as the fruit of classicism" (Brown, 90). Maravall concurs that "we can characterize the Renaissance, with all its purity of precepts, as the first manifestation of the subsequent baroque" (7), and he continues, "'wherever the problem of the baroque emerges, the existence of Classicism remains implicit'" (8). It seems that the baroque as a phenomenon cannot exist without the alterity that a contrasting classicism affords to it. For Brown, "[t]he baroque is at once the opposite of the classic and identical to it, later and simultaneous, cancellation and fulfillment" (106). The relationship between the classical and the baroque aesthetic can be understood as two sides of the same "epochal unfolding," two different expressions of the same plant—the flower and the fruit—to simultaneous yet opposed perspectives through which to view the world and the human subject. Hence, the baroque is that mode of representation that exists solely as representation, divorced from any "resemblance" with the thing itself.

The view of the baroque aesthetic of appearances detached from the world of objects, as a "'system of form-alienated signs'" (Brown, 99) clearly coincides with an explicit situation of the baroque as the backdrop of classicism, the deconstructive moment of *resemblance* that allows for the construction of a new order of representation. The baroque is that almost imperceptible *différance* that allows for the effects of difference and identity that are the basis of the classical *épistémè*. In *Marges de la philosophie* there appears the text of a lecture given to the Société française de philosophie in January 1968,⁴ in which deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida defines "la *différance*" (to which I have alluded in the heading of this subsection) as an anterior temporization or "espacement,"

neither active nor passive, neither a word nor a concept, which generates the differences between a thing and its sign. For Derrida, the distance or difference (whether real or abstract) between a thing or “presence” and its sign, the sign being precisely a “présence différée” or representation of the absent thing or presence, is only possible because of *différance* (9). It is with reference to Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* that Derrida relates *différance* to a pre-ontological non-being, stating: “Ce qui s’écrit *différance*, ce sera donc le mouvement de jeu qui ‘produit’, par ce qui n’est pas simplement une activité, ces différences, ces effets de différence” (12). Less a definition than a performance of this *différance*, the text of Derrida’s “la *différance*” puts into play “ces effets de différence” in the way that the phonic difference between “différence” and “*différance*” cannot be detected by his audience but is visible to his readers in the form of a visual trace—the letter *e* or *a*. This sensory *décalage* is the result of an initial speech-act—“Je parlerai donc, d’une lettre” (3)—that introduces a “dérèglement” between sight and sound, between speech and writing, between sensibility and intelligibility. Etymologically as the present participle (*différant*) of the French verb *différer*, derived from the Latin infinitive *differre* (defined as “to temporize”), which when given the passive ending -*ance*, *différance* implies neither an active nor a passive spacing, which illustrates the much more fortuitous difference between the English word “being” (*être*) and “being” (*étant*), which can be *neither* audibly nor visually distinguished. Regarding *différance* Derrida asserts: “la *différance* n’est certes que le déploiement historial et époqual de l’être ou de la différence ontologique. Le *a* de la *différance* marque le *mouvement* de ce déploiement” (23). The inaudible *a* of *différance* serves as an interrogation of the difference between being and language, signaling that *différance* which is the being of language proper, an awareness of that separation being conceived in the baroque.

It is the momentariness of baroque art as “an art of flux—of time” (Brown 101) which allows for the possibility of establishing a fixed and stable order based on distilled classical forms. Brown remarks on how the perceptible difference between the classical and the baroque is minimal (like an *e* or an *a*), but the effect produced is profound. What marks the baroque is the embodiment of the estranged meanings of words, a new experience of language (in the general sense of representation) and things that traverses the spectrum of affective response, from the grotesque to the sublime, an art that expresses the entire gamut of highs and lows of human being. Brown concludes that “the classic is the baroque” in an ontological sense, for “the classic does not exist” (107); “when the classic comes to life it always does so in a belated baroque language of turmoil and self-division” (108). The baroque usurps the classical, rational form in its “becoming,” and infuses it with living energy, renders its existence somehow other, corrupted, less than perfect, even insane, but perhaps more closely human.⁵

In *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* (1960), Foucault endeavors to write a history of the ways in which madness has been constructed in Western civilization. In the first chapter, he starts with a description of the way in which, in the second half of the fifteenth century, the theme of “la folie” replaces that of “la mort” as the experience of the void (*le néant*), noting that “[l]a folie c’est le déjà-là de la mort” (26). This morbid fascination translated into a pathology of the mind, that is to say madness in the character of the waking or living dead, recalls all sorts of grotesque and fantastic imagery of ghouls and zombies, terrifying monstrosities that are already present in the early Renaissance in the forms of gothic symbolism.⁶ Ad it is precisely this horrifying vision of madness that is at the foundation of “l’expérience classique de la folie” (27-8). This movement from the margins

to the center, from outside to inside, defines the evolution of the concept of madness itself, as Foucault notes, from “une forme relative à la raison, [... où] folie et raison entrent dans une relation perpétuellement réversible qui fait que toute folie a sa raison qui la juge et la maîtrise” (41) toward being “une des formes mêmes de la raison [... où] la folie ne détient sens et valeur que dans le champ même de la raison” (44). Foucault sees this interiorization of madness as the foundation for “le grand renfermement” and the institutionalization of madness during the classical age, noting the prevalence of madness in literary works from the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. They represent “un art qui, dans son effort pour maîtriser cette raison qui se cherche, reconnaît la présence de la folie, de *sa* folie, la cerne, l’investit pour finalement en triompher. Jeux d’un âge baroque.” (47) The baroque plays on the notion of madness within reason, and of reason, and through this recognition it is able to reach beyond the madness to find its own modes of understanding or “entendement” as *unreason*. For Foucault, “La folie, c’est la forme la plus pure, la plus totale du *quiproquo* [...] la folie est le grand trompe-l’œil dans les structures tragi-comiques de la littérature préclassique” (51-2). For Foucault, the baroque investment of madness within reason itself was not only evident in art and literature (recall the characters of “le fou” and “le poète”), it is also “[c]e monde du début du XVII^e siècle [qui] est étrangement hospitalier à la folie” (55). In the baroque, madness or unreason is an integral part of reason itself, as the internal boundaries of reason; it is accepted and entertained as such, and as a result, arrives at its own reasonable resolution as madness “within reason.” Foucault again states:

Maitrisée, la folie maintient toutes les apparences de son règne. Elle fait maintenant partie des mesures de la raison et du travail de la vérité. Elle joue à la surface des choses et dans le scintillement du jour, sur tous les jeux de l’apparence, sur l’équivoque du réel et de l’illusion, sur toute cette trame indéfinie, toujours reprise, toujours rompue, qui unit et sépare à la fois la vérité et le paraître. Elle cache et manifeste, elle dit le vrai et le mensonge, elle est ombre et lumière. Elle miroite; figure centrale et indulgente, figure déjà précaire de cet âge baroque. (53-4)

The unreasonable (*la déraison*) resides in the margins of knowledge and the depths of the imagination and finds its expression in the baroque liberty of representation, making use of madness and allegory as means to convey the hidden power of language and reason (*logos*), re-presenting the “thing” where it is not. Smoke and mirrors, grand illusion, the baroque is always an art of effects, of semblance, and while it may appear as “madness,” it is only the somewhat distorted, hyperbolic, or extreme reflection or representation of reason.

In *La folie du voir: De l’esthétique baroque* (1986), Christine Buci-Glucksmann elaborates the intricacies of a baroque aesthetic with corresponding epistemological groundings based explicitly on the immediacy of “seeing,” which involves “la duplicité de la Voix (cri) et du Voir dans l’écrit” (21).⁷ Although her analysis, as her title suggests, focuses largely on the visual, I believe that the general theory can be applied to sensory perception in general, and this notion can be translated into various textual strategies that give image and sound to the words of a text, stressing the intentional bias of looking obliquely at something that at face value may appear plain and mundane.⁸ Buci-Glucksmann elaborates, “la Voix doit précisément *représenter* le texte, le ‘faire voir’ par l’écoute, le mettre en scène et en corps. [...] Être, c’est Voir: en cela, l’œil baroque s’installe dès l’origine dans un nouveau partage du visible, qui accorde au regard un ‘optikon’ ontologique, une portée épistémologique et esthétique” (29). In the baroque, being is seeing; vision

(or sensory perception more generally) is the ontological priority at the basis of being; the visible in the sense of representability is what exerts its aesthetic or epistemological "presence."⁹ The baroque is once again shown to be an art (and a science) of effects, of "le paraître," which is not the mere chaos of excess or the monstrous phantasms of the imagination and unreason, but rather the appearance of deformity or disorder that follows its own internal rules based on the convergence of perspectives.

Buci-Glucksmann provides the portrait of baroque masking and metamorphosis that "ferait coïncider ici science et leurre, raison et sans raison, en une loi toujours déviée, prise de biais" (43). In the baroque mind and in baroque arts, a thing is never quite completely either what it is nor what it seems, for it is always also what it is and what it *appears* to be—how it is represented.¹⁰ Accordingly, she concludes, "La 'chose' y est vouée au paradoxe visuel, à la perte de qualités fixes, à une privation permanente de substance, au corps fictif" (43). For Buci-Glucksmann, seeing is an *effect* of knowing. What one knows to be real or orchestrated spectacle influences what or *how* one sees or hears. Thus, the (incom)possible world one sees and hears is dependent upon the particular way of knowing to which one has subscribed, one's point of view, perspective, or bias, one's visionary or auditory experience of words and things.¹¹ It is therefore a way of looking and listening, a way of *reading* that is baroque: "Ce regard-là, se soutenant de ce qui s'y dérobe, se déréglant dans le jeu de ses apparences, ce regard de biais, tissé des crevasses du mourir et de l'oubli, était baroque" (18). The "(dé)règlement" peculiar to the baroque is not merely disorder for its own sake, but a sensual destabilization and re-ordering of perception based on spectacular dramaturgy of the passions that deviates into the multiplicity of its constituent harmonies and deviations and the overwhelming dissonance of emotions vacillating from the sublime to the obscene.

In his book *L'Artifice* (1988), which is an extension of his 1985 work *L'Impureté*, Guy Scarpetta discusses the return(s) of the baroque, in terms of both cultural content and aesthetic techniques, stressing that it is not a backwards return *to* the baroque, rather: "c'est le Baroque lui-même qui revient" (22). Pure movement above (or below) essence, a pre-ontological *différance*, the baroque appearance is a "techné," the other defining characteristic of the Aristotelian man, a technique or process of production that renders some-thing out of the no-thing-ness of raw material. Buci-Glucksmann writes, "[e]n suspens, [la techné] manifesterà dans son plein le mouvement quasi spirallique du vide qui l'anime" (50), and "le baroque construit *une mimétique du rien*" (49). The process of becoming or rendering—"produire des effets qui créent des êtres"—of baroque art (*tekhnē*) performs the very *mise-en-abîme* of language that the Foucauldian rupture with Renaissance *ressemblance* outlines in which words do not recall things but only the absent no-thing that necessitates the deferred presence of re-presentation, (the *différance* that produces differences); and in the proliferation of signs another image or "vision" is created, not the vision of verbal representation, but, either allegorically or through the kind of deranged reflections of unreason, a different vision of the very nothingness that unfolds into multiple and different meanings of beings.

In *La Société du Spectacle* (1967), Guy Debord discusses the contemporary structuring of reality through representations in that the machinery of modernity operates through the proliferation of imagery that usurps the function of reality such that "tout ce qui était directement vécu s'est éloigné dans une représentation" (3). He clarifies that, "Le spectacle n'est pas un ensemble d'images, mais un rapport social entre des personnes, médiatisé par des images" (4). In what seems eerily reminiscent of the baroque notion of the world

as theatre, Debord's spectacle is also a mediation of human life and interaction through representation (social, cultural, and political) in and by social institutions, especially the mass media and democracies. This representation usurps and becomes the basis of reality itself as a substitute for reality.¹² According to Debord, "l'origine du spectacle est la perte de l'unité du monde" and that what remains is a fragmented abstraction assuming the form of a spectacle whose very "*mode d'être concret est justement l'abstraction*" (15). Interestingly, Debord defines the baroque as the point at which "*le temps historique qui envahit l'art s'est exprimé d'abord dans la sphère même de l'art,*" and about this art becoming the expression of the times, he states that it is "*l'art d'un monde qui a perdu son centre*" and "*l'art du changement*" (145). It is here that the modern spectacle that Debord identifies and defines becomes very close to the baroque, first in the sense of a loss of unity or centeredness in the world, and secondly in the pervasive spectacle and artifice deployed to fill that vacuity. The manner by which the subject/spectator lives is a world of calculated illusion, and the affinity between the predominance of "*la scène*" in the baroque culture a society of spectacle whose expression is constantly mediated by the language and rhetoric of "*l'écran*" (the screen) quite possibly represents one of the most striking affinities between distant baroque and neo-baroque epochs.¹³

If there is an essential quality to the baroque, it is precisely the more specific relationship between reality and illusion. In *Le Baroque: profondeurs de l'apparence* (1973), Claude-Gilbert Dubois analyzes the spectacular displays of power that were essential to the baroque monarchies of Early Modern Europe, describing "*une éthique de l'illusion*" in the festivals of the early seventeenth century which functions through the representation of presences that are, in reality, absent and thus allegorizes those objects through their aesthetic images. An ethic of appearance dominates the social scene. Dubois writes: "*[l]a vie s'impose comme manifestation et comme spectacle*" (159), and further on, "*il y a cette attestation d'une manière d'être, dont l'expression est spectacle de cette existence*" (163).¹⁴ It is clear how a political ethos (or arguably, lack thereof) can indeed be fundamentally aesthetic in nature, precisely in the very baroque nature of the representation of power. Dubois describes how, in the baroque period, "*[c]ette alliance du spectacle et de la vie politique, puisque le théâtre est un moyen de publier une idée politique et d'agir sur les consciences par le moteur de l'admiration ou de la terreur, connut une vigueur particulière pendant les périodes de frénésie et de changement*" (169). The pervasive spectacle described by Dubois is encapsulated by the metaphor, "*La vie est un théâtre*" (179), in which whole of society is transformed into a performative arena in which to represent oneself; he writes:

[À] la limite, elle est une célébration, qui s'adjoint un rituel: 'pompe' accompagnant les actes de la vie officielle, utilisation du 'décor' de la rhétorique pour la transformation du discours en panégyrique, cérémonial théâtral des 'entrées,' des 'sorties,' accompagnées de gestes et de mots – les mots de théâtre – qui sont comme le sublime du rituel protocolaire (159).

In the Baroque period, Dubois recognizes the organization of appearances as a political strategy, which essentially creates the "truth" of social reality through ritual performances.¹⁵

In *La raison baroque* (1984): Christine Buci-Glucksmann writes "*[l]a Raison baroque: le terme peut paraître provocateur, tant le 'rendre raison' de la raison a effacé la pluralité des raisons classiques et occulté le baroque comme paradigme de pensée et d'écriture qui excède les modèles convenus du penser, la logique de l'identité*" (184). In its quest

for absolute certainty and classical perfection, Enlightenment rationality served only to efface the plurality of reasons recomposed in a dissonant harmony of Renaissance ruins, replacing the multiplicity of techniques for rendering something true to form and the diversity of perspectives with the monolithic Order of representation, all the while suppressing any aesthetic and epistemological variations of “baroque” irregularity as unworthy divergences or differences. But the baroque over time has proven resilient, the unreasonability of its “reason” being that Vision which the baroque eye “sees” or apprehends in its entirety language and its limits. From this, one may conclude that Baroque reason, in as much as it defies rationality as the appearance of madness, chaos, and difference or as the reflection of the internal limits of logic, order, and identity, is a material, corporeal reason that inhabits the body and the world in the non-finitude of its constantly evolving material existence. Discussing the nature of his professed task of the “*revaluation of all values*,” Nietzsche writes: “the art of separating without setting against one another; to mix nothing, to ‘reconcile’ nothing; a tremendous variety that is nevertheless the opposite of chaos—this was the precondition, the long, secret work and artistry of my instinct” (254). It is important to make the distinction that the baroque is not something “separate” but rather something that is “within,” operating simultaneously yet in opposition to more mainstream modes of expression and understanding, a movement within and across material and psychological boundaries. In an essay entitled “Pour une histoire pervertie” in *Résurgences Baroques*, Mieke Bal discusses a kind of frustration when faced with a baroque image because of the way it resists definition, which can both discourage and elicit a supplementary effort to think about “la signification de la difficulté de voir.” For Bal, this near resignation and ancillary effort to think what the difficulty of apprehension might itself entail symbolizes “un rapport inverse entre le présent et le passé qui inaugure le mouvement oscillant que je conçois comme une histoire culturelle opérant en sens inverse, une histoire perverse dans le sens étymologique du terme. Cette histoire, je l’appelle ‘baroque.’” (61) We might then understand baroque as a necessary involvement of the past and the present, each exhibiting reciprocal effects that sometimes escape our vision, in a way similar to Deleuze and Guattari’s “ligne de fuite.”¹⁶ Yet when this *ligne de fuite* itself is thought, the underlying temporality of history, the ontological difference of an “epochal unfolding” can be glimpsed in its relative obscurity. Thus, Bal states: “il est difficile de saisir le baroque—parce qu’il nous englobe. Nous sommes *dans* le baroque” (64). The inversion or “perversion” of history represents an alternative reading of time and space that disrupts and subverts divisions and linearity in favor of a “*regard cyclique sans aboutissement*” that confronts rational orders with the reality of bodies and being, and which proceeds much more organically and analogically, like a Deleuzian rhizome operating underneath the surface, spreading and manifesting itself in different areas of thought, art, and culture.¹⁷

Notes

- ¹ Similarly, Eugenio d'Ors proposes that the baroque is specifically "un style de culture" (*Du Baroque*, 91).
- ² See Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque*: "Baroque culture thus extended to the most varied manifestations of social life and human works, although different manifestations predominated in different places..." (10). For specific differences, see Trevor Aston, ed. *Crisis in Europe: 1560-1660* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965).
- ³ See Maravall's *Culture of the Baroque*, chapter 9 entitled "The Social Role of Artifice" (225-47); see also Claude-Gilbert Dubois, *Le Baroque: profondeurs de l'apparence* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1973), pp. 159-80 for a discussion of how "la vie s'impose comme manifestation et comme spectacle" in Early Modern French society.
- ⁴ For the complete transcription of the talk, including introductions, questions and comments, see its original publication in the *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* LXIII "Séance du 27 janvier 1968 (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1968), pp. 75-101. The text I will refer to here appears in Derrida's 1972 publication *Marges de la Philosophie* (Paris: Édition de Minuit) pp. 3-29.
- ⁵ Giancarlo Maiorino. *The Cornucopian Mind and the Baroque Unity of the Arts*, indeed reasserts the distinction made by Werner Weisbach regarding baroque art as "a style of being" and "a style of becoming," thus creating an art that "probe[s] into the shapelessness of the ever-unfolding matter of life amidst an open universe without ends in sight" (2-3).
- ⁶ Eugenio d'Ors, *Du Baroque*, recognizes the *Barocchus gothicus* as a particular manifestation of a baroque spirit, noting "de telles autres manifestations couronnées par le développement du 'gothique fleuri', espèce baroque type, traduction rigoureuse et fidèle de l'éon baroque" (124).
- ⁷ Bertrand Gibert, *Le baroque littéraire français*, echoes this statement regarding the doubling effects of a baroque aesthetic: "Dès les origines de la poésie baroque, on peut dénombrer toutes sortes d'effets de miroir et d'échos entre le matériau phonique, la structure poétique et les effets sémantiques" (191).
- ⁸ Think, for example, of the unrelenting poetic effect espoused by the endless succession of alexandrine verses in the works of Molière, Racine, and Corneille for example, and the ways in which the sensory effect can at times overwhelm the verbal content of a play or scene. For example, in acte III, scène VI of Molière's *Le Tartuffe*, a scene in which Tartuffe dodges culpability by pitting father Orgon Against his son Damis, the rhetorical rapidity by which Tartuffe manages to manipulate the narrative is underscored by the rapid succession of rhyming dialogue, which although tragic in nature, creates a hyperbolic comedic effect as the form and content tend toward the absurd.
- ⁹ Perhaps it is useful here to recall Descartes' *Méditations* in which his vision of the empirical world as existent or as a kind of divine trickery is dependent first and foremost on his rational knowing of his own thinking subjectivity (*cogito*) and the world then appears as it "is" from this initial cognitive moment.
- ¹⁰ Benito Pelegrín remarks in "Typologie des écritures baroques" that "même s'il n'est pas exclusivement verbal, l'esprit se manifeste essentiellement par le 'concepto', le 'mot', apparence, surface, qui est le seul témoignage d'une réalité intime: le paraître est la seule manifestation de l'être" (89).
- ¹¹ Bertrand Gibert, *Le baroque littéraire français*, supports this conception that, "Le baroque est un art démonstratif, qui cherche à séduire et impressionner par des moyens visuels, y compris dans le langage. La formule de la 'peinture parlante' (*pictura loquens*) est particulièrement vivante dans sa pratique littéraire: 'donner à voir' y est un des maîtres mots de la poésie et de l'éloquence." (165)
- ¹² Along these same lines, and in a way that rings harmonically with Benito Pelegrín's analysis of the Baroque in *D'Un temps d'incertitude* (2008), see Jean Baudrillard's *L'Échange impossible* (Paris:

Galilée, 1999), which outlines the double bind of contemporary society, based on the impossibility of exchange in a world dominated by uncertainty and self-contained systems. His analysis of the economic sphere, "prise dans sa globalité, ne s'échange contre rien," extends the same "inéquivalence" unto the political, juridical, and aesthetic spheres, all haunted by their own illusion and impossible to exchange against anything, only Nothing; and metaphysically, also with a wink to Nietzsche, he states, "les valeurs, les finalités et les causes que nous circonscrivons ne valent que pour une pensée humaine, trop humaine. Elles sont irrelevant au regard de quelque autre réalité que ce soit (peut-être même en regard de la 'réalité' tout court)." (11-15)

¹³ Accordingly, Scarpetta remarks in the case of modern televisual media, that a rhetorical strategy of appearances produces the effect of (effective) truth: "la 'vérité du spectacle,'" a relative truth that nonetheless pretends to absolute authority (*L'Artifice*, 26).

¹⁴ In Debord's *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, first published in French in 1988, he indeed notes the spectacle's "rapid extension over the last twenty years [since 1968]" (4), and attributes it various forms of spectacular power: "Spectacular power, which is so fundamentally unitary, so concentrated by the very weight of things, and entirely despotic in spirit, frequently rails at the appearance in its realm of a spectacular politics, a spectacular justice, a spectacular medicine and all the other similarly surprising examples of 'media excess'" (6).

¹⁵ According to Jean Rousset, *La littérature de l'âge Baroque en France*, "Cette époque, qui a dit et cru, plus que toute autre, que le monde est un théâtre et la vie une comédie où il faut revêtir un rôle, était destinée à faire de la métaphore une réalité/ le théâtre déborde hors du théâtre, envahit le monde, le transforme en une scène animée par les machines, l'assujettit à ses propres lois de mobilité et de métamorphose. Le sol semble vaciller, les maisons se transforment en boîtes à surprise, les murs s'ouvrent comme des portants, les jardins et les fleuves prennent part aux jeux de la scène, deviennent eux-mêmes théâtre et décor" (28). This notion will also be elaborated in chapter 5 in relation to Achille Mbembe's analysis of the political culture of the Postcolony.

¹⁶ In the Introduction to *Mille Plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari define "lignes de fuite" in contrast to lignes d'articulation ou de segmentarité" (both of which make up the rhizome), the former being more akin to "des mouvements de déterritorialisation et de déstratification," and he continues: "Les vitesses comparées d'écoulement d'après ces lignes entraînent des phénomènes de retard relatif, de viscosité, ou au contraire de précipitation et de rupture." (9-10) As such, the baroque might be understood as a de-stratification of history, which places different times (and spaces) in dialogue, but not to positively signify anything in particular, rather to disrupt everything in terms of the absolute totality of linear history and narrative progress."

¹⁷ In the Introduction to *Mille Plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari define the literary concept of the rhizome as a way by which "l'un fait partie du multiple," elaborating certain approximative characteristics of connection and heterogeneity, multiplicity, a "rupture assignifiante" or an "antigénéalogie," and the principles of cartography and of decalcomania (or layered tracing, like a palimpsest) (pp. 13-21). This notion will also be explored more fully in the next chapter.

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Disorder and Devastation: Searching for the Sublime in Horrific Sports Injuries

JEREMY MECKLER

Immanuel Kant's third critique, the *Critique of Judgement* published in 1790, establishes a complex schema for the judgements of pure aesthetic experience, placing such judgements into three primary categories – the agreeable, the good and the beautiful – and a fourth elusive category called the “sublime”. It is this latter category which has borne the richest philosophical and aesthetic fruit over the past two centuries, leading countless thinkers, critics, and artists into deep engagement with its mysterious ungraspability. Something in its boundless formlessness, its disorder and devastation keeps the sublime relevant, and yet simultaneously outside the bounds of full theoretical apprehension; by its very nature the sublime evades any bounds set around it. Yet the pure aesthetic experiences that were the basis for Kant's schema are harder to come by in the contemporary world. In a form of late capitalism where nearly every experience and object is incorporated into a process of accumulation or indoctrination, the aesthetic experience is rarely pure. What this paper seeks to explore is whether a sublime experience can be found hidden in the hyper-mediatized and commodified experience of the sports spectacle, particularly within horrific sports injuries. I will argue that the horrific injury, by breaking the bounds of the idealized human body and perverting the purposive shape we associate with that ideal and with the human body in general, smuggles the Kantian sublime into contemporary mass media culture – offering an explanation for both the discomfiting appeal of such images and the popularity of sports spectatorship generally. Through the disjuncture of horrific injuries purity can enter into a late capitalist subjective space.

In this inquiry it is important to identify the function of sports spectacles. I am not interested in an aesthetic evaluation of *participation* in athletics, but in sports viewing, fandom, and spectacle as a site of potential engagement with aesthetic experience. As has only become more apparent since the coronavirus pandemic led to the shutdown of most major sports leagues, sports spectatorship plays a central role in late capitalist media production and consumption. Indeed, it's difficult to think of another form of live spectacle with anywhere near the popularity or cultural significance of sports, and considering that the vast majority of sports engagement is through spectatorship rather than participation, it seems straightforward to read major sporting events as massively popular aesthetic texts. While there is much to be written about sports participation, such analysis likely has little to do with aesthetics. We will be thinking of images of sports, rather than sports themselves in their material realities. Spectatorship, for our evaluation, can be through any format – live in-person, mediated through a television screen, through a radio, or a news article or internet video – all of these potential engagements will fit within our area of inquiry into aesthetics in athletics. The basic question is, can the viewer of sports experience the beautiful or the sublime in a Kantian sense?

Of course, before we begin to engage with the question we must first understand the terms. Specifically, what do we mean by “pure” regarding aesthetic experience? For this we will be primarily distinguishing between Kant’s three categories: the agreeable, the good, and the beautiful. The agreeable is simply enough, that which in looking causes direct pleasure, through the faculty of sensation. Like a good taste or a pleasant color, the agreeable is the most basic, direct representation of pleasure and it operates through pleasing “the senses in sensation” (*CJ*, §3.1, 205, Translated by Paul Guyer, Cambridge University Press, 2008). The agreeable, has little relevance in our experience of sports spectatorship, which relates more to representations than it does to sensations. Perhaps the roar of the crowd, the nostalgic taste of a ball park hotdog, the appealing color of one team’s uniform, or the attractiveness of a particular athlete would function as agreeable, but for most engaged sports spectators these elements are secondary to the drama of the represented competition.

Kant’s second relation is much more prevalent in sports spectatorship. The good, for Kant, is a concrete category that relates to a judgment of an object of taste and incorporates an element of cognition or reason. An evaluation of something as good refers to its ability to achieve a certain end, purpose or goal. This involvement of purpose as a part of the evaluative process is limiting, and thus not “pure.” As Kant puts it: “If one judges objects merely in accordance with concepts, then all representation of beauty is lost” (*CJ*, §8.6, 215). It’s fairly easy to see such pleasure in sports – any play can be judged as good if it is conceived with its goal in mind, for instance scoring points or winning the game. Any evaluation of sports that keeps in mind the rules and structure of the game must necessarily be limited and thus good instead of beautiful.

The pure aesthetic experience is reserved for the beautiful and the sublime. The beautiful is something completely separate from reason. A pure judgement of beauty involves no purpose or end for the object being judged. It is purely an evaluation of an object in terms of its purposive form, its form that implies a purposiveness without relating it to a specific purpose. “That is beautiful which pleases universally without a concept” (*CJ*, §9.10, 219), Kant writes, meaning that no element of the cognitive function, which assigns ends or purposes to objects, is engaged in an evaluation of pure beauty. This does not mean, as it could be read, that the beautiful must be agreed upon by all people to be considered beautiful. The universality of beauty exists not in the external world but in the mind experiencing the beautiful. In order for a subject to find an object beautiful, such a subject must see this object’s form as universally, *a priori*, pleasing. It must be, at the same time subjectively beautiful, beautiful to the specific subject observing it, and objectively beautiful, that is universally pleasing without relation to a concept.

Such a conception may pose a problem in the evaluation of an athletic spectacle as an example of the beautiful, especially when we talk about “interest” in such spectatorship. For Kant, “Any interest spoils the judgment of taste and deprives it of its impartiality” (*CJ*, §13.1, 223), and partiality is often an essential function of sports spectatorship. Rooting for a team or a player, a form of emotional and personal interest, or in fact, having bet money on one team or the other as many sports spectators do, certainly can be seen as a spoiling interest in this sense. Yet there are other ways to watch sports that can look past such personal investment. Hans Gumbrecht, in his 2006 book *In Praise of Athletic Beauty* attempts to conceive of sports as aesthetic beauty in this sense, by pointing out that no matter what personal emotional investment, sports fans cannot gain anything real or measurable from the pleasure of sports spectatorship. As Gumbrecht writes, “On your

way home and the day after you may continue to indulge in exceptional happiness about what you saw, but you will not harbor any illusions about the positive consequences of these feelings for your social status or your savings account" (39-40). Yet there certainly remains some interest in such an exchange, even if the benefit is only internal, in a sense of pleasure or satisfaction in seeing "your" team succeed.

How then can a sports spectacle surpass the good and reach the purely beautiful? Simply put, a play in sports can be found beautiful only if it is considered without its purpose. The *beauty* of the play, as opposed to its goodness, is not determined by this purpose, but is instead determined by the form of its movements. A play becomes beautiful only when abstracted from interest and ends, only when we understand it like a dance. Like the botanist who finds a flower beautiful despite knowing its purposive ends (see *CJ*, §16.2, 229), a sports fan can find a play beautiful while knowing the purpose behind its movements, only when the form is abstracted from that purpose. As Kant explains it specifically, "A judgment of taste in regard to an object with a determinate internal end would thus be pure only if the person making the judgment either had no concept of this end or abstracted from it in his judgment" (*CJ*, §16.8, 231). Here we can see that to reach a pure evaluation of the beauty of a play, we must abstract it from its determinate internal purpose, that is the intention to win the game.

The limited scope in the way sports can be found beautiful actually seems to fit well with the parlance of sports media and discourse. "Beauty" usually has little to do with the outcome of the game, and refers instead to the form or style of play. A play may be beautiful in the way the ball and bodies move, or an individual player's form may be beautiful if it is abstracted from the context of a particular moment or goal, like the phrase "he has a beautiful jump shot." It is not beautiful because the shot goes in, in fact an ugly jump shot may have the same chance of going in, but it is beautiful because of its form. And indeed, beauty tends to supersede our personal interest; I may find a play undeniably beautiful even if I am rooting for the other team. I am much more likely to experience the awe of aesthetic beauty at such a moment than the more concrete pleasure of the good, since the purposive ends I have in mind call for a different outcome. Indeed, Kant's motivation to write the Third Critique came from a similar inquiry into the colloquial use of the word "beautiful" and a desire to logically delineate such forms of judgement, so taking our cues from the linguistic particularities of sports media is in keeping with Kant's underlying aesthetic project.

Now to throw a wrench into this line of reasoning, Kant also argues that pure beauty can never be found in the scale of the human being, specifically because the purposive ends of humanity can never be fully abstracted. The human, tied to a teleological destiny, always has the essential purpose of perfection. So, with regards to the human body, the closest that we can come to pure beauty is "adherent" beauty. The play can be beautiful in the way a dance can, adherently.

So while a play or an individual player's form (while playing) may be beautiful when abstracted from the specifics of such a context, this is not the same thing as finding individual players to be beautiful in themselves. Such an evaluation would have more to do with the agreeable, or else with Kant's "beauty ideal." Kant derives his ideal of beauty from a comparison of thousands of similar bodies conducted within the imagination, finding amongst them a mean of the normal, beautiful body. As he puts it "the average size becomes recognizable, which is in both height and breadth equidistant from the most extreme boundaries of the largest and smallest statures; and this is the stature for a

beautiful man" (*CJ*, §17.5, 234). This seems fairly irrelevant for the individual athletes involved in sports, as the bodies of athletes tend to be the extremes of such an evaluation: the tallest, the strongest, the fastest, the most agile, etc. but the beauty ideal, and its creation of an ideal of a beautiful human body is essential to the rupture that occurs in the horrific injury. It is the violent disruption of this ideal that leads us to the sublime.

But how can we get to the sublime in sports spectatorship? Gumbrecht ties Kant's sublime to those sporting events that are 'beyond any comparison', like Babe Ruth's famously called shot during the 1932 World Series. Such events have an aura of otherworldliness and incomparability, but are also very uncommon. As such, Gumbrecht finds that the sublime has little to do with most athletic spectatorship. As he writes, "We should reserve the concept of the sublime, then, for the breathtaking singularity of events and achievements of this kind [those 'beyond any comparison']. But in general, I believe that the sublime has less of an affinity with sports than does the concept of beauty—however trendy the sublime may have recently become among professional intellectuals" (48). The main problem in his analysis is that he thinks of the history of sports as a string of glorious accomplishments, of great athletes surmounting world records and towering opposition, yet he ignores the important other side of athletic experience. What happens to the aesthetic experience of sports when the spectacle of athletic spectatorship causes displeasure instead of pleasure? What happens when the beautiful, or the possibility of the beautiful, is disrupted by the gruesome or the grotesque through the intercession of a horrific injury? Could such moments constitute the sublime? It is important to remember the focus of this inquiry is not on the individual athlete, for whom the horrific injury can hardly be called disinterested, but on the *spectacle* of athletic spectatorship. For the spectator, watching the disfigurement occur, there is a certain disruption of the dance-like beauty of the sports spectacle; the search for the pleasure of good and beauty that exemplifies most sports viewing is replaced by a displeasure, a grotesque horror that is painful to see, often causing viewers to wince or avert their eyes, and at the same time hard to ignore. Such occurrences, fairly common in most major sports, provide a far better example than Gumbrecht's for the dynamic and mathematical functions that constitute the Kantian sublime.

For this investigation into the sublime in grotesque sports injuries, we'll be looking specifically at a case study: a gruesome injury that took place in October of 2017. Gordon Hayward, an All-Star forward, playing his first game for the Boston Celtics, got his leg tied up with another player's in midair, and landed awkwardly, breaking his tibia and dislocating his ankle. His foot ended up pointing in the wrong direction, with what looks like an extra joint in his leg between ankle and knee. Players from the Celtics and the opposing Cleveland Cavaliers scattered, the game stopped, and medical staff rushed to the court to strap Hayward to a gurney. The "good" elements of the game, those devoted to the success of plays and the interest of players, fans, and gamblers, were abandoned at the sight of this injury. The injury is certainly horrific, leading to content warnings from announcers before replays, and yet it also contains a gruesome and ambivalent attraction – we *want* to see such an image even though it may cause us displeasure. Indeed, in reading this you may have already looked up such an image, driven by a perverse desire to see something you know will be upsetting.

Yet, before moving forward, we should expand our definition of Kant's sublime. The experience of the sublime is caused by a sensation that surpasses the understanding, a sensation Kant refers to as the mathematically sublime. The imagination perceives

something that is absolutely great, great beyond all comparison, and fundamentally infinite in experience (*CJ*, §25, 248-50). As opposed to the aesthetic evaluation of the beautiful, which concerns exclusively a purposive form without purpose, the sublime relies upon an object that is formless and boundless. When the imagination can find no limit to such an object it is seen as boundless and when the imagination can find no definitive form to it, it is formless. It may be hard to associate such magnitude, such a sense of majesty, with an individual grotesque injury, but as Kant establishes, "That is sublime which even to be able to think of demonstrates a faculty of the mind that surpasses every measure of the senses" (*CJ*, §25.8, 250), so it is clear that the constitution of the mathematically sublime exists not in scientifically measurable magnitude – indeed in the following section of the analytic, §26, Kant distinguishes between mathematical measurement through numerical concepts and aesthetic measurement through intuition – so it is not the literal scale as much as the intuited boundlessness that exemplifies the mathematically sublime.

If we remember Kant's concept of the "beauty ideal," that imagined normality based on the comparison of all human bodies, we can see the truly horrific injury as a disruption of that ideal constituting such boundlessness. The true disfigurement is so far from the normal that it doesn't shift the average of that ideal in the direction of distension but instead ruptures it entirely. Through this break, the horrific injury achieves a formlessness similar to the mathematical sublime, itself produced by a disjunction between the apprehension and the comprehension, by observing something whose aesthetic infinitude exceeds the ability of the imagination to cognize. It is only through the delayed intercession of the faculty of reason that we can conceive that this truly is a totality, a thing and not just a wrongness. While claiming a connection between a singular horrific injury and the infinite magnitude may be counterintuitive, it is worthwhile to remember that Kant's mathematical sublime is not figured through mathematical estimation of magnitude but from aesthetic estimation of magnitude, in which the absolutely great and infinite magnitude is simply the product of the apprehension of scale exceeding the comprehension (*CJ*, §26.2, 251). The wrongness of the horrific injury, in its disruption of the beauty ideal of the human body, produces an aesthetic absolute magnitude, exceeding the limitations of mathematical estimations of magnitude – when we look at the limb with too many joints, we see a wrongness that numerically exceeds comprehension, and produces a mathematically sublime effect in much the same way as the Great Pyramids or a towering mountain range does.

And, because this wrongness constitutes a disruption of the beauty ideal, it also implies within it all of the other ways in which such an ideal could be disrupted. We can't help but look at a disfiguring injury and feel a sensitivity to the way our own body could be broken or destroyed. Indeed, the monstrosity of the mathematically sublime is produced in exactly this annihilation of purposive ends: "An object is monstrous if by its magnitude it annihilates the end which its concept constitutes" (*CJ*, §26.5, 253). If Gordon Hayward's shin can break in such a way as to suggest that he has an extra joint, then what is to say that all of the concrete intuitions of the human body wrapped up in our beauty ideal couldn't be similarly, and infinitely, broken and made monstrous? The purposive ends of the human body, themselves tied directly to the beauty ideal and the teleological destiny of humanity, are disrupted when the body is distended in this way, suggesting potential disruptions that are limitless in their possibilities. Our concept of a leg, constructed by the beauty ideal from encountering many other legs, is thus annihilated

by such a sight. These injuries also seem to surpass the limitations of the human body, those limitations that made the beauty in sports constitute only an adherent beauty, specifically because through their disruption of the beauty ideal, they are no longer a part of the human body. As if the camera pulled in closer, we see the horrific leg injury as a totality, not as a piece of the human body it is connected to, thus ignoring humanity's inherent tendency towards perfection. The wrongness of the injury becomes a freestanding wrongness, a wrongness without a body attached to it that functions like the mathematically sublime, an immeasurable wrongness that surpasses every measure of the senses.

The sublime also functions through what Kant refers to as the dynamically sublime, that which Kant describes as a vibration, "a rapidly alternating repulsion from and attraction to one and the same object" (*CJ*, §27.3, 258). The object is a source of fear for the subject because of its boundless formlessness; the fearfulness repels but at the same time a sense of safety or mastery over that fear attracts. The mental faculties experience pain in not being able to comprehend something, and, as reason intercedes by introducing a concept of totality to the object, there is a delayed pleasure, produced through initial displeasure. As Kant puts it, "the object is taken up as sublime with a pleasure that is possible only by means of a displeasure" (*CJ*, §27.6, 260). Horrific sports injuries present a clear example of Kant's dynamically sublime. In fact, it might be hard to imagine a better example than spectacular disfigurements. Like car crashes or natural disasters, a disfiguring injury is horrible to look at causing displeasure and fear, yet at the same time it has an undeniable appeal. This appeal can be measured through the millions of times YouTube videos of Hayward's injury have been viewed – a YouTube search for "Gordon Hayward injury" results in hundreds of uploads of the same footage, the most popular of which ("First Take reacts to Gordon Hayward's injury during Celtics vs. Cavaliers | First Take | ESPN") currently has 1,817,716 views. Looking at the footage, we can see the immediate fearful response felt by many players on the court with him. Indeed, the injury – which occurred in front of the Celtics bench – led the rest of the team to flee the sight of it, clearing the bench as they saw the gruesome injury in front of them. While these players may not describe such a reaction as sublime, their fear indicates some element of the dynamically sublime response. Indeed, for Kant fearfulness is essential to produce the dynamic sublime, but only for those who are protected from the source of that fear. As Kant describes it in his discussion of the fearsomeness of mountain peaks:

"the sight of them only becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is, as long as we find ourselves in safety, and we gladly call these objects sublime because they elevate the strength of our soul above its usual level, and allow us to discover within ourselves a capacity for resistance of quite another kind" (*CJ*, §28.5, 261).

And of course, as with Kant's pure sublime, there is a delay in achieving this state of experience as the mental faculties apperceive that which surpasses comprehension. We can see this fairly clearly by looking at the responses of players on the court moments later after their initial fear; no longer running from the sight of this injury, players and fans are certainly experiencing something powerful. Whether that response is revulsion, pity, or shock, it is extreme and very different from the initial response of direct fear. The delayed function of apperception has transformed that fear into a sublime understanding of totality. This delay is even visible in the play-by-play commentating. Announcer Kevin Harlan repeats himself several times and pauses for long periods, unable to process or find the words to describe the experience:

They're going up – Oh my goodness! Hayward came down so hard. Okay – Hayward broke his leg. Hayward has broken his leg. Hayward has broken his leg.

[8 seconds of silence]

Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh.

[6 seconds of silence]

And that is how quickly a season can change... (NBA, YouTube).

Quotes from other players involved seem to mirror these sublime elements in the aesthetic experience. In interviews following the injury, both LeBron James and Kyrie Irving listed other similarly gruesome injuries they had experienced, pointing to the power and singularity of this experience, and Kyrie Irving's response, calling this injury "[one] of the worst ones" (Forsberg), bears with it an implication similar to the boundlessness of the "absolutely great." For viewers at home, the immediate desire to flee the sight of such a fearsome object may be diminished somewhat by the intermediation of the screen. The screen's delivery of safety to those viewing is what allows us to enjoy scary movies or news coverage from warzones without actively fearing for our lives. The lessening of the immediate fear, despite the fearfulness of the image itself, gives the viewer the sense of safety required for experiencing the sublime. Like Kant looking at mountains, the gruesome injury becomes all the more sublime and attractive for its gruesomeness, specifically because viewers are safe behind the mediation of the screen.

Such gruesome atrocities are even more prevalent in sports with regular injuries, like MMA fighting or NASCAR. Indeed, the experience of the sublime may explain the longstanding claim that fans watch NASCAR "for the wrecks." In the moment of disjunction represented by the wreck, spectators gain access to a pure aesthetic experience, unmarred by interest. Such a drive for purity could go a long way to explain the centrality of sports spectacles in contemporary society. Within the hypercommodified media environment, the adherent beauty and occasional sublimity of sports spectacles offers us a brief glimpse of "pure" aesthetic experience so lacking in the rest of our lives.

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From Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* to the iCloud: A Comparative Analysis between the Romantic Concept of the Sublime and Cyberspace

MIGUEL ANGEL GAETE

Abstract

The appearance of cyberspace in the 1960s and their ongoing development nowadays, has posed questions and theorisations of various types about its nature and future progression. This paper proposes the sublime as a crucial and valid concept to comprehend both the theoretical and aesthetic development of this phenomenon. In so doing, this research looks back at the origin of the sublime. Thus, Longinus, Burke and Kant's considerations about this concept are the main grounds upon which this investigation stands. Likewise, historic Romanticism and an iconic painting by Caspar David Friedrich serve to shed light on the aspects that cyberspace takes from a worldview that struggled with the surrounding in manners not so different from ours.

Keywords: sublime, cyberspace, Romanticism, technoromanticism

Introduction

The aesthetic concept of the sublime has been profusely employed to understand the romantic landscape painting of the nineteenth century. It is, in effect, a term customarily employed to expound Caspar David Friedrich's paintings and, in general, to refer to everything that is beyond the scope of beauty. The sublime entails powerful conceptual associations such as the infinite and the limitless, together with a series of overwhelming feelings that they can elicit in those who experience it.

It was Pseudo-Longinus, in the 1st century AD, who first coined the word that led to what today we understand as sublime: the *Hypsos* (*Peri Hypsous*).¹ Such a construct implied evocative ideas related to "the highest" and to a degree of spiritual "elevation", a feeling akin to "transcendence" (Doran 27). In the eighteenth century, Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) proposed, among other things, that the sublime can be suggested or even created by the succession of elements in the space. He called it "the artificial infinity" (Burke 119). Little after Kant added more components to the sublime by proclaiming the existence of two types of sublimity: one dynamic and the other one mathematical (Kant, *Critique of Judgment* 101). Likewise, Kant appealed to the "immaterial" and "formless" (*das Unform*) as conditions of the sublime (Kant, *Critique of Judgment* 105).

In the nineteenth century, Romanticism built its lines of reasoning on the sublime mostly backed on this triumvirate. Their influence steadily continued in the twentieth century. From the 1970s onwards, foremost philosophers such as J. F. Lyotard, F. Jameson, Jean-

Luc Nancy, G. Deleuze, P. Lacoue-Labarthe, M. Deguy, S. Žižek, among others, wrote profusely about the sublime.² Most recently, informed publications such as the *Digital Sublime* by Vincent Mosco or *Virtual Geographies* by Sabine Heuser aboard this concept in the modern context of digitalisation, yet tangentially and anchored in postmodern theories and the cyberpunk aesthetic. Nonetheless, the correlation between the sublime and landscape paintings, and ultimately its inextricable connexion with the romantic spirit, is an aspect that current theorisations have tended to leave aside. As a result, the sublime's original meaning has tended to dilution disregarding that if the sublime became so relevant in philosophical debates, it was mostly because of its direct impact on landscape painting and its enthusiastic reception by romanticists.

In a certain way, this paper intends to return to the most "classic" understanding of the sublime, that is Longinus, Burke and Kant's reflections, to comprehend an ongoing phenomenon. Accordingly, this article will focus on how cyberspace fuses a series of elements formerly attributed to the sublime and the romantic spirit. Three main topics will be developed to reinforce the links between the romantic sublime and the so-called "third environment". The first one poses the similitudes among *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, the *Cloud Storage System* and the most widespread definitions of the sublime. The next one addresses the aesthetic characteristics of cyberspace to determine the extent to which they replicate some visual aspects traditionally attached to the sublime. The last section brings together cyberspace and the historic Romanticism through the figures of the Romantic hero, the *Wanderer*, and the hacker.

The Sea of Fog and the Cloud

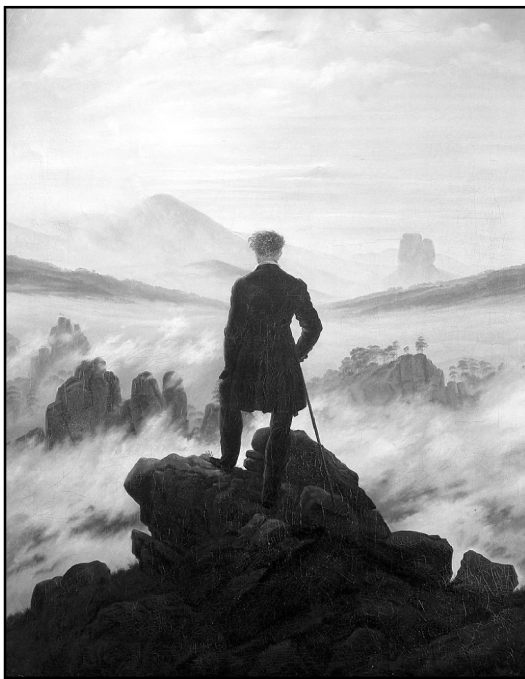


Fig. 1. Friedrich, Caspar David. *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, 1818
Oil-on-canvas, 94.8 cm × 74.8 cm, Kunsthalle Hamburg, Germany

The German painter Caspar David Friedrich rendered in 1818 one of his most famous canvases, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (Fig. 1). Its protagonist, an anonymous figure seen from behind, also known as *Rückenfigur* [back-figure], conceals from us his identity. There has been much speculation about this character. According to some historians, the turned hiker was a high-ranking officer named Friedrich Gotthard von Brincken of the Saxon infantry. The man wears the green uniform of the volunteer rangers, which would make this painting a patriotic allegory (Koerner 210–11). There is consensus, however, on that this artwork conveys meanings that reflect a profound inner state of mind and spirit rather than nationalistic messages. Thereby, it became distinctive of the romantic feeling.

Friedrich's painting is about experiencing the surrounding from a subjective and emotional standpoint. To him, landscapes became "a backdrop subordinated to human drama, to a self-contained emotive subject" (Delphi Classics 107). In this way, viewers take this man's position in the world, seeing the landscape through his eyes. What can be seen are shapes barely suggested, though. For the fog veiled them, neither the peaks of the mountains in the background nor the murky trees in the remote forest on the right side of the painting are thoroughly defined. Thus, just the same that in the ocean we can only estimate the enormous richness of forms below the surface; in this painting, spectators glimpse only a little part of nature. From the man's posture, we can infer this *Wanderer* climbed the summit of this mountain just to experience a landscape submerged in the fog from the highest. It appears, thus, that Friedrich sought not merely to explore the blissful enjoyment of a beautiful view but rather to have an encounter with the spiritual *Self* through the contemplation of nature. Romantics regarded such state of introspection or "emotional reflection" as an essential part of the whole of human experience (Riou 31). Unlike beautiful objects, which are expressed by its formal features, that is, contours, shapes and a sort of unity (Bird 427), in this Friedrich's sublime landscape there are no clear boundaries which suggests the mysterious and inscrutable of life and the world.

The cloud storage system (hereafter CSS), on the other hand, is a massive and in appearance infinite sea of data. Researchers have described it as a "big, ill-defined, useful, fuzzy, expansive collection of computers strung across the Internet, which ostensibly allows users to store data at any time, of any size, and in various digital formats, and to access that data whenever they want" (DePietro 173). The CSS also possesses abstract qualities based on physical technologies which make it "as much theoretical as practical":

It is theoretical in that users believe they can store as much data as they want without limitation. It is practical in that it is a collection of interconnected computers and computer systems that are real and finite in their ability to store and transfer data. It is theoretical in that users believe that big, commercial service providers like Google give storage for free. It is practical in that there is a fixed cost associated with using the cloud, but it may not be monetary. Like an atmospheric cloud is amorphous, free-floating, and without boundaries, so is the notion of the cloud in the world of computers and new media" (DePietro 173).

Cyberspace, on the other hand, the realm that hosts the *Cloud*, has been succinctly portrayed as a "limitless depository of information" (Brown and Turley 304). In view of this, what joins the CSS with Friedrich's painting is not only the evocative name coined for the virtual space where people upload and save their files but the underlying presence of the sublime in their conceptual foundations. It is patent that both the CSS and cyberspace combine various of the elements formerly attributed to the sublime and the Romantic worldview. Kant, for instance, claimed that the sublime is an issue detached of any shape so that it represented by itself the idea of no-limitation. Therefore, it is

magnitude what mostly defined the sublime: “sublime is the name given to what is absolutely great” (Kant, *Critique of Judgment* 238). Such immensity is a condition *sine qua non* for the sublime “must always be great” (Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* 48).

It was also Kant who relocated the sublime from the natural elements of the landscape to the viewer’s aesthetic experience (Prettejohn 44). In this way, we could liken the experience of Friedrich’s *Wanderer* and that of the user/dweller of cyberspace. Both experiences suggest the idea of limitless and, consequently, both might potentially overwhelm the human condition and our capacity to estimate distances, measurements and data. Moreover, both the CSS and Friedrich’s landscape are ill-defined, amorphous, and as much theoretical as practical.

It seems apparent too that the CSS through a synthesised image of a cloud, and Friedrich’s painting through the suggestive image of clouds, mountains and size-reduced objects in the landscape, symbolically appeal to the highest, to a metaphorical location beyond our place on earth. This, in turn, recalls Longinus’ cogitation of the sublime. For Longinus, the sublime interconnects to a state of abstraction. The *Hypsos*, the sublime’s linguistic root, entails an elevation of the hearer toward “the highest”. The word itself refers to height, and it implies motion of mind in a state of ecstasy. Such rapture involves a combination of fear, horror, and fascination. Longinus portrays it like a thunderbolt, a lightning flash incited by the orator through a discourse whose “violence, rapidity, strength, and vehemence” can overwhelm the audience (Longinus 48).

Burke and Kant’s contributions to the sublime are also critical to deepening in its connections with the emergence of cyberspace, the Internet, and the CSS. Edmund Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* proposes that the sublime can be intentionally induced. In the ninth section of the second part of the text, Burke reflects about the infinite, allegorical, literal, and conceptual sustenance of the sublime. In this chapter, Burke suggests a ground-breaking idea which consists in that the sublime could be created by the succession and uniform locating of elements in the space, so revealing the existence of a simulated sublimity. He grounds his argument in what he names “the artificial infinite” (Burke 119). According to him, the succession of the parts continued in a specific direction is required to impregnate in the imagination “an idea of their progress beyond their actual limits” (Burke 119). In other words, the progression of aligned elements on a surface might create the impression of endlessness, and therefore, sublimity.

Similarly, Kant asserts the existence of two types of sublimity: one dynamic and another one mathematical. The latter one appeals to three elements as conditions for the sublime: “limitlessness”, “formlessness” and the idea of totality. Consequently, the judgment of the sublime “is to be found in a formless object insofar as limitlessness is represented in it, or at least at its instance, and yet it is also thought as a totality” (Doran 211). From that onwards, the sublime relates to a “greatness beyond all possibility of calculation, measurement, or imitation” (Lauring and Nadal 394).

The Third Environment

The central notions behind Longinus, Burke and Kant’s definition of the sublime are limitless, the highest, immateriality, absence of boundaries, formlessness, nature, and artificiality. Based on this, we could characterise most of the constituents of our daily life as sublimines. Hence, for example, the money that banks keep in the *Cloud* is immaterial,

virtual, and formless. It could hardly be assured that it even exists as such. Money, nowadays, is abstract numbers transferred from one account to another. Similarly, modern metropolises, unlike walled medieval cities, are virtually infinite and amorphous.

Nevertheless, the propensity to the unmeasurable is probably more perceptible in the expansion of a virtual world interlaced with the real one. In this regard, it is worth remembering that until recently, the main spheres of human development were restricted to two environments: nature (*physis*) and city (*polis*) (Echeverria, 55). At present, a new social scenario based on information technologies and telecommunications has come to complement the former two. This new setting is in a state of constant definition mostly because of its principles of artificiality and immateriality. Javier Echeverria has coined the name "third environment" for it. The third environment came out in the last sixty years. Eight factors of everyday use manipulated remotely and in a network by a large part of the world's population sustain this third environment: telephone, television, electronic money, telematics systems, multimedia technologies, video games, virtual reality and telecommunications satellites (Echeverria 15).

The sublime has historically proceeded in surroundings that are familiar for all of us, that is to say, nature, landscapes, cities and towns. Effectively, elements that one could identify either as sublime or as triggering of it were either created or already existed in those two settings. Thus, for instance, "the sight of a mountain whose snow-covered peaks arise above the clouds" or "the description of a raging storm", might arouse the feeling of the sublime (Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* 14). And so might do it too "the noise of vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder, or artillery" (Burke 138).

Manuel Castells explains that the historical concurrence of three independent processes that occurred between the late sixties and mid-seventies originated this new world. Castells specifically mentions the information-technology revolution, the economic crisis of both statism and capitalism, and the growth of social and cultural movements such as anti-authoritarianism, human rights, feminism, and environmentalism. According to him, the interaction of these processes and their reactions created a new dominant social structure: "the network society", a new economy: "the global informational", and a new culture: "the culture of real virtuality" (Castells, 372).

The first stage of expansion of the third environment was tangible and supported by technological equipment. The space exploration prompted the development of technologies that helped overstep the limits of humankind. That stage was entirely scientific and focused on pushing physical boundaries. It based on distance calculations, equipment resistance, propulsion capacity, the handling of an enormous amount of data, etcetera. In this respect, the Apollo's journey to the moon epitomises the emergence of the technological sublime in the twentieth century. It is meaningful that sublime in Latin means "below the limits" (*sub-limes*) (Parret 114).³ There were no more limits after the conquest of the outer space. Humanity reached the "highest", the *Hypsos*. Since that event, the planet as a symbolic frontier does not exist anymore.

Once humanity conquered that limit, the development of this scientific-military expansion returned to focus on the earth and the political crises of that time. The Internet, a network of connection points without central authority "designed from scratch to operate even broken down" (Sterling 17), as well as a compressive array of virtual worlds were by far the main upshots of the space race. Now, it is valid to interrogate the degree to which the sublime illustrates the virtual realm developed from that clash of powers and ideologies.

Infinite Zeros and Ones, the Virtual and the Sublime

The linguistic root of the word *virtual* is rather conclusive in order to champion the sublime as a valid concept to define the current scenario of human development. Pierre Lévy asserts that “virtual” comes from the Latin medieval “*virtualis*”, itself derived from *virtus*, force, power (Lévy 13). This definition of the virtual is strongly tied to Kant’s definition of the dynamic sublime for both entail the idea of overwhelming power. To Kant, the dynamic sublime surfaces when the immeasurable force “make our power of resistance of trifling moment in comparison with their might” (Kant, *Critique of judgment* 261). Kant gives as examples the feeling in front of a gigantic mountain or the sea on a stormy day.

The power of cyberspace lies in its capacity to colonise almost every field of the human progression while it builds a perception of the infinite. It evolves in a virtual environment which lacks a shape. The mathematical sublime is extremely useful to construe this new metaphysic built upon bytes, zeros, and ones. This Kantian concept involves a breakdown of our minds when seeking logical measurements. The concept itself has to do with vast magnitudes and numbers. According to Kant, we are in front of the mathematical sublime when our mind collapses while pursuing to establish a measurement of certain natural elements. This occurs because of our intellect is “incapable of affording us any absolute concept of a magnitude, and can, instead, only afford one that is always based on comparison” (Kant, *Critique of judgment* 248).

At the end of 1969, Arpanet, the primitive Internet, was just a small network made up of no more than four connection points. In 2020, experts estimate there are 50 billions of devices connected to the web (Nordrum). Likewise, the number of websites has been reckoned in over 1.5 billion. Even though those might sound like precise numbers, our minds cannot visualise them. There is an undetermined point where our minds fail estimating quantities like those. That happens because the mathematical sublime cannot be intellectually apprehended. Moreover, these numbers might be easily increased by adding new servers so that the Internet becomes practically infinite. This represents a relocation of Kant’s mathematical sublime and Burke’s claim regarding the succession of parts to access the artificial sublime. In this respect, the Internet is converging with other technological developments such as biotechnology, nanotechnology and neurosciences which has led modern thinkers to consider it as an “instrument that can infinitely enable humans to coexist and merge with machines” (Winter et al. 86). Likewise, some authors predict the existence of an interconnected global mind, the main characteristic of which will be to progressively incorporate organic and inorganic elements in order to create a power of calculation and interpretation that “will be out of control and beyond our understanding” (Kelly 260). The Internet, as far as it is the sublime energy that connects the virtual and the real, possesses all the attributes of divinity. The central characteristics of the Internet are, indeed, its “ubiquity, instantaneity, and immediacy; the total vision and the total power” (Armitage 36).

As the virtual space is unlimited, artificial, and in no small degree abstract, its graphic representation has always been a problematic issue. In effect, any effort to project a shape of this space is, in principle, speculative for it does not actually have any form, it is *die Formlosigkeit*. The nomenclature used to label this new reality is symbolic, alluding to its eventual existence in a physical plane: “cyberspace”, “metaverse”, “matrix” or “global village”. In this matter, Virilio, following Pascal, maintains that we live in a meta-city “whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference nowhere” (Virilio 11), so that

today, this “village” has become a de-territorialised ground. Like if it were a “sublime meta-reality”, cyberspace lacks physical borders, precise location and shape: “The dimensions of globalisation are close to immeasurable. In any case, the world no longer has an outside” (Negri and Henninger 53). Borders, however, never disappear but relocate to blossom in the guise of new aesthetic languages.

From the Darkness to the Light

The Internet and the myriad of virtual worlds that it connects are infinite areas without defined limits. This means it cannot be mapped as if it were a physical terrain which can be geographically or topographically represented. Nevertheless, in the social imaginary, some representations have tried to show this meta-reality as a black labyrinth wherein all its edges are either neon green or glowing blue and red. In general, users still see it as a dark parallel cosmos, where the diaphanous light of Apollo cannot penetrate. Thereby, the only way to project it is through reflective lines, leather and latex suits, much like the cyberpunk and the cyber underground aesthetics have displayed it throughout the years (Fig. 2).

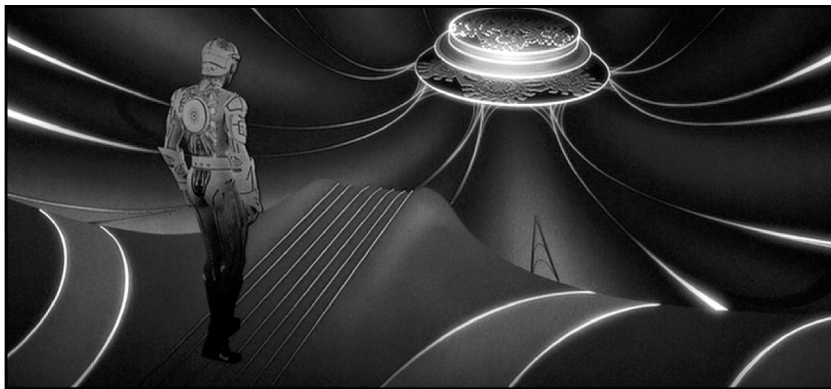


Fig. 2. Steven Lisberger. Tron. Television and film series. 1982

During the last decades, however, representations of cyberspace have shifted from dark atmospheres towards lighter ones. Such phenomenon coincides with the massification of devices that allow us to connect to this metaverse. As the range of potential clients widened from the hackers hidden in the basement of a university college to children, young, adults, and older people; publicity, in response to the market requirements, has opted to purify the aesthetics of cyberspace. Technological brands appeal nowadays to the luminous whiteness of the blue, white, silver and sky blue of the Christian altars. The sharp vertices and edges that predominated in the cyber aesthetic have become softer and curved edges taking the features of the heaven, the highest, the *Hypsos*.

In the metaverse, Judeo-Christian notions of heaven and hell have acquired new meanings and characteristics. The white and immaculate *Cloud* has become the space of the legal and consecrated social communications as well as the area for corporate transparency. Here, the apple of Adam redeems itself from its millenary negativity. Its aesthetic is pleasant to the senses (Fig. 3). The purified aesthetic of the *Hypsos* reflects a central aspect of Thomas Aquinas' legacy: *Pulchra enim dicitur quae visa placent* ("Beauty

is what pleases the eye”) (Beardsley 101). Insofar as cyberspace became a virtual representation of the *Hypsos*, it began progressively to integrate elements of beauty. Thereby, the trinity of conditions of beauty reign in there: “integrity and perfection”, “proportion or harmony” and most importantly “luminosity and clarity” (Beardsley 102).



Fig. 3. iCloud. Apple Inc. Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak.

Techno Romanticism and the New Hero

The sublime meta-reality has proved to be a fertile ground for the development of an adapted Romanticism. Scholars who have investigated the permanence of Romanticism in our days have coined the term *Techno-Romanticism* to explain such influence (Coyne).

There are indeed strong links between some practices carried out in the third environment and the Romantic thought. The most conspicuous of them is the principle of participation in digital media which was somehow advanced by a Romantic thinker as Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his *Letter to d'Alembert* published in 1758 it is read:

Plant a stake crowned with flowers in the middle of a square; gather the people together there, and you will have a festival. Do better yet; let the spectators become an entertainment to themselves; make them actors themselves; do it so that each sees and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united. (Friedlander 201)

Theories on technological humanism have also embraced the possibility of explaining several of the features of our context on the base of the romantic understanding of the world. Thus, we might regard the current longing for a primitive and pure nature, widely exploited by capitalism and the tourism industry as the upshot of the schism between man and nature, an essential subject for romantics. In the same vein, we could explain our experiencing of nature as one grounded in a distorted idea of its limits. The industrial revolution boosted indeed, the notion of nature as an obstacle to progress. If mountains, storms, the ocean, or a sea of fog elicited the feeling of the sublime in Romantic spirits, now what provokes astonishment is the sublime effect of technology on the environment and the generation of artificial realms.

Modernity has disclosed the weaknesses of man amidst overpowering forces. Such forces are not exclusively natural but also technological. In both scenarios, humans occupy the position of misfit and melancholic dwellers. Techno-Romanticism claims the recognition of man not only as a sensitive being but as a supra-sensitive. According to Jose Luis Molinuevo, if the first historic Romanticism, was a humanism of the misery of

man, the second is a humanism of power that discovers a teleology in nature whose rational foundation is a theological belief (Molinuevo 88). Such a position has enabled humans to create multiple versions of the world, most of them artificial, limitless, and sublimes.

The hero, a central figure for historic Romanticism, has also evolved.⁴ In Romantic literature, art and politics, the hero stood as a liberating figure of both the oppressed and himself. Aristocrat, individualist, hermetic and arrogant, exasperatingly self-pitying, romantics showed themselves as heroes and saviours through their creations. Nevertheless, in the sublime meta-reality, there is another character that claims such status. It is an enigmatic figure, attacked by the media: the hacker. This character is not the tragic Werther, nor it is who moves masses to defeat governments. But neither is the computer criminal that we have been led to believe (Himanen viii). In the sublime meta-reality, hackers reveal as the silent heirs of the new perspectives of Romanticism.

Likewise, the new hero takes much of his ideological inspiration from Marxism. Marx nurtured from the romantic dialectic to give shape to his discourse in such a way that "the terms that Marx uses to characterise the commodity are drawn from the lexicon of Romantic aesthetics and hermeneutics" (Mitchell 188). Furthermore, most of global capitalism's features replicate aspects of the theory of the sublime. Terry Eagleton, for instance, demonstrates that Marx appealed to traditional images of the sublime to speak about capitalism. He claims that for Marx, the exchange and excessive accumulation of money and commodities would provoke a sort of anguish and terror, both feelings that define the sublime. Eagleton believes that "Money for Marx is a kind of monstrous sublimity, an infinitely generating signifier which has severed all relation with the real, a fantastical idealism which blots out specific value as surely as those more conventional figures of sublimity engulf all particular identities in their unbounded excess. Therefore, the sublime, for Marx as for Kant, is *Das Unform*, the formless or monstrous." (Eagleton 212)

There is a paradox in the comparison between the hacker with the romantic hero, however. The hacker, unlike the romantic protagonist, does not pursue to experience the sublime as the *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* did. The hacker fights the limitless and monstrous sublimity in the prevalent socio-economical system. Furthermore, many of the hacker's actions seek the reintegration of the collective in an environment that prioritises the cult of the *Self*. Capitalism has indeed transformed this meta city in a social factory that requires the submission of a connected multitude to exist. The definition of sublimity also fits in the description of this phenomenon. Experiencing the sublime in effect involves an amount of masochism, so does our relationship with the economic machinery behind the third environment: "at certain distances, and with certain modifications" danger or pain "may be delightful, as we every day experience" (Burke 138).

Conclusion

The sublime, as reviewed in this paper, pervades the majority of the ambits of our daily lives. In principle, we can expound pivotal phenomena of our time, such as the emergence of cyberspace and the third environment through the prism of Longinus, Burke and Kant's towering reflections on the sublime.

Cyberspace builds itself upon several components which correspond to the romantic idea of the sublime. The CSS is, in this sense, axiomatic and illuminating. Among its characteristics, "the artificial infinite" and "its greatness beyond all possibility of calculation, measurement, or imitation" are the most relevant. Likewise, cyberspace's

visual representations reveal the extent to which it is powerfully fastened to the "limitlessness" and "formlessness". As a whole, its aesthetic and philosophy congregate features from Longinus' *Hypsos*, Burke's artificial infinite as well as Kant's dynamic and mathematical sublime.

Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, on the other hand, is a masterpiece of the German Romanticism which utterly embodies the aesthetic of the sublime in the nineteenth century and a prevalent feeling of uncertainty toward the world. From a broader and contemporary perspective, it is also representative of the magnitude of the new setting that humankind face. Arguably, we are, like the *Wanderer* watching pensively to a blurred and sublime world, in a continual struggle with the reconfiguration of its limits. Cyberspace and the third environment have indeed restructured the old *Imago Mundi* which came to be replaced by vague and nonphysical margins.

Cyberspace and the romantic spirit also seem to be inexorably bonded. A range of its foundational claims came from historic Romanticism. New heroes and characters have come to supersede the romantic, melancholic and sufferer roamer. Users of the CSS and digital heroes have taken the place of dwellers of the highest, the *Hypsos*. Thus, in the same fashion that the sublime mediated human relations to nature and landscape in the nineteenth century, it settles nowadays as the main *force* that channels the current interactions with the digital realm.

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Notes

¹ On the different translations of the sublime: van Eck et. Al 11.

² *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question* originally published in 1988 compiles many of these authors. See also: Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime: Kant's Critique of Judgment*, [Sections] 23-29. F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, T. Rachwal & T. Slawek (eds.), *The Most Sublime Act: Essays on the Sublime*. Most recently: P. Shaw, *The Sublime*, and T. Costelloe (ed), *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*. A thorough compilation on publications about the sublime: Holmqvist, Kenneth, and Jaroslaw Pluciennik. "A Short Guide to the Theory of the Sublime." *Style*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2002, pp. 718-736. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.36.4.718. Accessed 4 Aug. 2020.

³ There are, naturally, more translations of the sublime which anyway differ little among them. Philip Shaw (119), for instance, explains: "Derived from the Latin *sublimis*, a combination of *sub* (up to) and *limen* (lintel, literally the top piece of a door). The sublime is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'Set or raised aloft, high up'." George Quasha and Charles Stein deepen in its liminal condition: "A limen in Latin is a threshold. While its current usage is principally behavioural with respect to the threshold of a physiological or psychological response, in fact, liminal or borderline states are anywhere that something is about to undergo a phase transition or turn into something else" (in Morley, 214). Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* provides five meanings for the sublime: 1. "high in place; exalted aloft". 2. "High in excellence"; "exalted by nature". 3. "High in sentiment"; "lofty"; "grand". 4. "Elevated by joy". 5. "haughty"; "proud".

"Page View, Page 1969." *A Dictionary of the English Language: A Digital Edition of the 1755 Classic by Samuel Johnson*. Edited by Brandi Besalke. Last modified: December 6, 2012. <https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/page-view/&i=1969>.

- ⁴ On this topic: Thorslev, Peter L. *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962. Williams, Simon. *Wagner and the Romantic Hero*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Argullol, R. *El héroe y el único, el espíritu trágico del Romanticismo*. Madrid: Taurus, 1984. Ridge, George R. *The Hero in French Romantic Literature*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1959. Also, Gish, Theodore. "'Wanderlust' and 'Wanderleid': The Motif of the Wandering Hero in German Romanticism." *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1964, pp. 225–239.

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Anthony Philip Heinrich's *Thundering of Niagara*: Hearing American Sublimity

GLEN W. HICKS

Abstract

The nineteenth-century trans-Atlantic dialogue between Americans and their European contemporaries sustained “one of the most vibrant intercultural exchanges in all of Western music history”. In this cosmopolitan environment, the Americanization of the sublime aided in the rebranding of the European symphonic tradition while perpetuating the idealization of the nation’s geography, people, and beliefs. Anthony Philip Heinrich (1781-1861) provided the foundation for a repertoire that became internationally recognized for the first time as “American”. Heinrich’s *The Thundering of Niagara* serves as a case study of the natural sublime’s power to assert artistic autonomy through the formation of an American musical voice.

Keywords: American Sublime, Symphony, Niagara Falls, Wildness, Anthony Philip Heinrich’s *Thundering of Niagara*, Hearing American Sublimity

I. Introduction

When Anthony Philip Heinrich (1781–1861) confronted the criticism and censure of American composers in the preface of his “opera prima”, *The Dawning of Music in Kentucky; or, the Pleasures of Harmony in the Solitude of Nature* in 1820, he emphasized the perilous nature of an all-too-Eurocentric taste that dominated musical culture in the United States. Finding the condition of American music inundated with “too many *Butterfly-effusions*”, Heinrich concluded that if American composers, himself included, were to contribute in the “crowded” and “difficult” firmament of Western music, American music must be rooted in the nation’s landscape (2)¹. Sublime traits fused to the Beethovenian symphony, often imported (sometimes by Heinrich himself)² with an overwhelming sense of *Sehnsucht des Unendlichen* (longing for the infinite) that accompanied German imagination, would not suffice to engender an American music capable of linking nature’s sublimity with vernacular topics and tropes (Downes 86)³. As Heinrich’s music of natural sublimity would go on to show, the American sublime grew out of a disruption in the relationships among the United States, European symphonic music, and the American landscape and its inhabitants.⁴

II. Americanizing the ‘Natural’ Sublime

The appropriation of the natural sublime, or environmental sublime, as part of the American sublime marks the point at which the independence and exceptionalism that

spurred the “Spirit of ‘76” and the geographical uniqueness of the environment merged under the pretenses of national and artistic identity. The Presbyterian minister Samuel Stanhope Smith, writing in 1810, attributed America’s “climate” to the unique pairing of geography and politics (Brown 147). Smith articulated that this climate leaves a recognizable mark on those who live within it, a mark of “Americanness”. Over two centuries later, Chandos Brown describes “the great cultural work of the Anglophonic migration” to link geography with identity “was to render *terra incognita* into vernacular terms” (147). Brown further suggests,

[T]he American Revolution and the subsequent invention of the American state compelled Americans to expand their imagined geography to encompass both a physical environment – North America – and an emergent community conceived in revolution – the United States (147).

This disruption by revolution compelled Americans to view themselves and their environment differently. For nearly two generations, Americans relied on the diversity of the landscape to construct a national identity and subsequently, the natural sublime dominated America’s first focus on the sublime aesthetic from approximately 1820 to 1840. This initial phase, was itself, a result of the merger of three spirits: the ideological sublime of North American Protestantism, a fascination with the natural world, and the nationalist sublime propelled by the American Revolution. Heinrich lived and worked at this crossroads.

Heinrich’s *The Dawning of Music in Kentucky; or, the Pleasures of Harmony in the Solitude of Nature* mentioned earlier, was only the beginning of a career dedicated to the promotion of his own music and American exceptionalism, viewed through the natural sublime. Born in 1781 in Schönbüchel, Bohemia, Heinrich immigrated to the United States in 1816 after a failed attempt as an import-export merchant for the Austrian empire (Shadle 35). After two brief stints as the music director of theaters in Philadelphia, and later Pittsburgh, Heinrich traveled to Lexington, Kentucky in 1817 and soon after moved to Bardstown, Nelson County. In 1819, Heinrich relocated to a hemp plantation along Beargrass Creek named Farmington where he lived in a log cabin as a guest of the influential Judge John Speed and his family until approximately 1823 (Kleber 380).⁵ Although he was not completely isolated from domestic comforts, Heinrich still felt he had developed a new relationship with the wooded landscape he encountered in Nelson County, which would have a noticeable impact on his composition and eventually, disrupt his perception of Western music. Forests, mountains, and rivers became his “muse”, which he believed imbued his music with a distinctive quality not shared by his musical contemporaries, a quality that critics felt placed him “ahead of his age” (Shadle 51).⁶

Despite the assertions of uniqueness, Heinrich was part of a much greater movement within the United States that encompassed the arts, from musical composition to painting to the written word. “Kindred spirits”, like the poet William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878) and the landscape artists of the Hudson River School, primarily Thomas Cole (1801-1848), dedicated their careers to the mythmaking of American Nature which will evolve into a “symbolic opposition between Europe and America” (Chmaj 39). Betty Chmaj observes, “In an era when ‘Truth to Nature’ was a ruling idea guiding landscape and genre painters alike, romantic and realist writers, Heinrich’s efforts in music accurately reflect the strivings of the age” (49-50).

III. In Search of Authenticity

Born in a Massachusetts log cabin in 1794, William Cullen Bryant cultivated a relationship with nature that characterized his poetry and later, his writings as the editor of the *New York Evening Post* from 1827 to his death in 1878. Bryant's poems such as "Thanatopsis" (1817, rev. 1821) and "The Prairies" (1832) draw the American sublime into a "democratic and vernacularized terrain", which Rob Wilson defends "were piously [...] both contemplative and sublime in effect" (123). Wilson observes,

Bryant typically moved from subjective contemplation of natural imagery to an expansive mood of associated sublimity in which the idea or "high sentiment" of God emerged as the ideological trump card of any American sublimity (123).

Evident in such oft-quoted works as "Thanatopsis", and "The Prairies", Bryant's deity-enhanced sublimity also appears in "To A Waterfowl", and "A Forest Hymn". The flight of birds and poets in "To A Waterfowl" is sustained by "He who, from zone to zone, / Guides through the boundless sky their certain flight". And the "green tops" of "boundless power / And inaccessible majesty" of the American forests form "God's first temples" in "A Forest Hymn". This "immanent power of God" created a terrain that when curated by an American sense of entitled ownership justified the asserting of mountain ranges, rivers, and valleys, as artifacts of national identity regardless of the indigenous communities that called these places home (R. Wilson 126). Resultingly, the natural sublime was "negotiated as the site of self-empowerment" to buoy the American ego (R. Wilson 126). "Through such awe", writes Rob Wilson, "wildness is tamed and interiorized in the heart, linking the wild to the good, and power to ethos" (127). Here, "good" may be substituted with virtuous, righteous, and even honestas illustrated by the 1850s reputation of "Honest Abe" Lincoln and his log cabin origins.

In the United States, the symbolism of the log cabin alluded to the related concepts of wildness and wilderness which played an influential part in the aesthetics of the nineteenth century. During Heinrich's lifetime, wildness could refer to a number of different ideas. As a character trait, it could imply the extremes of savageness, brutality, or rudeness. Less aggressive qualities of wildness included the disposition to rove, irregularity of manners, an overactive imagination, and "the quality of being undisciplined, or not subjected to method or rules" (Webster). Heinrich's constant traveling, his tendency to speak his mind (which often resulted in frequent impassioned outbursts), and his unconventional composition practices accurately fit the definition of wildness in the early nineteenth century. When applied to the natural world, wildness denoted a "rough uncultivated state; as the wildness of a forest or heath" (Webster). Wilderness, as it relates to wildness, is thus "a tract of land or region uncultivated and uninhabited by human beings, whether a forest or a wide barren plain" (Webster). These definitions represent the predominant Euro-American perspective of natural wildness of the 1800s. The fact that the wilderness was perceived as "uninhabited by human beings" denies the existence of the indigenous peoples who inhabited much of the American "wilderness". The perception of wildness or wilderness was regularly tied to religious, political, or economic ideology (Toliver 332). The positive role wildness assumed in the United States became a trope of American authenticity. The cabins of Heinrich, Bryant, and Lincoln thus signify the nation's relationship with wildness (both natural and cultural) and displays an exploitation of the environment that defined the country throughout the

century. Artists and politicians with ties to the log cabin or the wildness of the American frontier invented bonds with geography, a union which gave American identity its uniqueness. Those with wilderness (wildness) origins were perceived as more American in the Euro-American culture of the 1800s.

To this equation, in which the symbolism of the log cabin equated wildness, the sanctification of wildness through text, image, and sound supported the sublime trope of divine foreordination. Together, they signaled "Americanness." This multi-valent cultural perception buoyed the valorization of wildness in the hearts of the American people. Heinrich's curated experience in his Kentucky log cabin was sufficient to persuade critics to distance the European-born composer from his homeland and render him an American, even a cultural ambassador for the United States (Shadle 36). For Heinrich and his compatriots, wildness was a characteristic of American authenticity.

IV. Wildness

Heinrich's compositional origins from a secluded log cabin borrowed from the symbol of the medieval hermit's cave and mystical communal with God and nature (Holl 216).⁸ The British hymnodist Benjamin Gough (1805-1877) poeticized of Heinrich,

When hermit-like and hid from vulgar view,
Thy spirit first its mighty impulse drew,
Twelve weary months within a sunless cave,
'Twas this that sweetened solitude, and gave
What worldly mildews never can destroy
A gush of fresh unutterable joy (Gough)!

Gough bestows a margin of sainthood that aligns with the composer's moniker of "Father Heinrich". Just as the ancient Fathers of the Catholic church established foundational theological and intellectual doctrines, Heinrich is repeatedly situated as a founder of American music, or as Harold Schonberg called him, "a brash apostle of an emergent America" (Schonberg).⁹ Gough further lends Heinrich the qualities of impulsiveness, freshness, and joyfulness, suggesting a feral uniqueness not experienced in the music of other composers; a uniqueness he ascribes to the composer's spiritual intimacy with Nature. Within Gough's poem, Heinrich's music redefines what music *is*:

Say what is music? Is it not the thrill
That sorrow checks not death can never kill,
That dwells in thunder's deep and awful voice.
And makes the choral gales of spring rejoice;
The poesy of sound the rich the wild
Creation's herald Nature's loveliest child (Gough)!

Here is music that originates from thunder, unconcerned with the rules of harmony. Chmaj suggests this new type of music rooted in the wildness perceived in their environment by Euro-Americans nature "counted for more than *science* and *restraint*" (46).¹⁰ The natural sublime provided Heinrich with a "stimulus to loftier voice", or the means to ascribe a divine origin to his music, justifying his departure from "well-worn stylistic paths", or wildness (R. Wilson 96; Shadle 55). The natural sublime, as Rob Wilson argues, "is used to serve as one means of evoking the infinite and even trans-social force of Jehovah, praising power that can somehow empower" (96). If Heinrich could legitimize

the wildness of his music through his relationship to nature, and as such, the divine, he could cast off the millstones of European symphonists that hung around the necks of American composers. Just as it had for Bryant and Cole, the power provided by the natural sublime solidified into an “ideological trump card” (R. Wilson 123). For Heinrich, this was easier said than done. Writing to the composer in 1842, the English tenor John Braham lamented, “I regret the Public have not yet done justice to your genius There is a wildness, an originality in your musical effusion that would delight a Cultivated audience” (Holl 219).¹¹ Braham, likely unfamiliar with the extent of audience cultivation in the United States, was overly optimistic. While Bryant and Cole became recognized for their “democratic vistas of immensity” that rivaled their European counterparts, Heinrich struggled to receive recognition as anything more than a subversive imitation of European “masters” (Shadle 9).

V. American Power

Beginning in the 1830s, Heinrich composed thirteen symphonic works over twenty years, many of which reference the American geography or people associated with the nation’s landscape. Heinrich’s first symphonic work to overtly reference the natural sublime is his *Der Kampf des Condor, amerikanisch charakteristisches Tongemählde* (*The Battle of the Condor, American Characteristic Tone-picture*), later renamed *The Ornithological Combat of Kings*. John Herron describes the work as a combination of “national mythology, natural science, and impressions of nature” that “create a distinctive American aesthetic” (630). Following its premiere in Vienna on June 9, 1836, August Mandel, secretary of the Musik-Verein, commented:

Heinrich’s muse is the daughter of Nature, but not that Nature whose quiet, idyllic grace possesses us all unconsciously. He has sought out Nature in her workshop where she produces her mighty works, where great bridges of rock are thrown across streams; where rivers, broad as seas, flow out of undiscovered sources over hundreds of miles to the ocean itself; where great lakes plunge with deafening roar to the depths below, and the tornado, with its crashing strength lays bare the impenetrable secrets of the primeval forests (Upton 143; Broyles 63; Shadle 41).

Although Viennese audiences were not strangers to natural phenomena referenced in music such as Haydn’s “Chaos” from *Die Schöpfung* (1797-98) and the storm in Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony (1802-08), this familiarity did not make the overall impression of Heinrich’s music any less idiosyncratic. Mandel does not cite specific locations in the excerpt quoted above; however, his analogous descriptions demonstrate knowledge of North-American geography. “Bridges of rock” “thrown across streams” recalls Natural Bridge in Virginia, deemed one of the “Natural Wonders of the Modern World”.¹² “Rivers, broad as seas” that flow for “hundreds of miles to the ocean” could refer to the Hudson or Mississippi rivers. “Great lakes” that “plunge with deafening roar to the depths below” – the closest Mandel comes to referring to a specific location – alludes to the Great Lakes and Niagara Falls. Later in the same review, Mandel specifically refers to Heinrich’s “orchestra scores” as “broad as the falls of Niagara” (Upton 143).

It comes as no surprise that Mandel would reference Natural Bridge and Niagara Falls in referring to Heinrich’s Americanness. Writing in 1872, Bryant labeled Natural Bridge and Niagara Falls as “the most remarkable curiosities in North America”, exceptionally beautiful, but “mingled with sublimity” (40). Depictions of these natural phenomena circulated through Europe long before the Mandel’s review in 1836 (Fig. 1). As symbols

of North America, both Natural Bridge and Niagara Falls were internationally recognized and used by foreign critics like Mandel to distinguish between the Old and New Worlds.

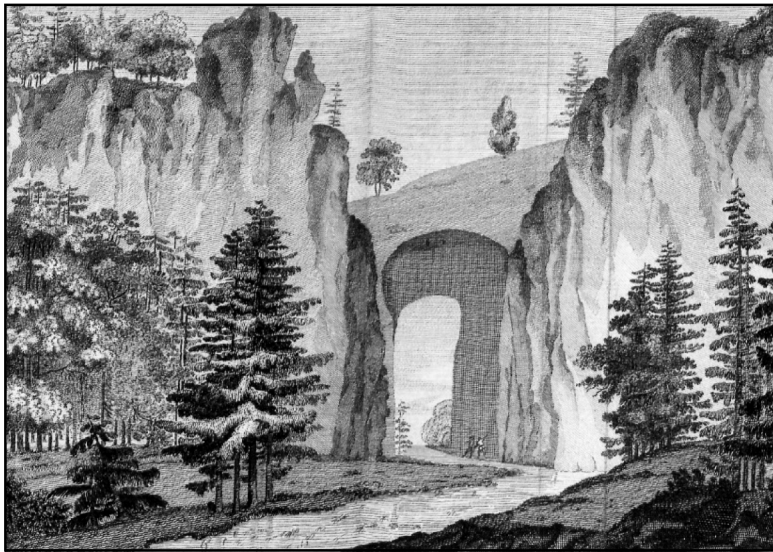


Fig. 1. de Chastellux, François-Jean. "Perspective Taken from Point A". 1787. Illustration of Natural Bridge, Virginia from *Travels in North-America in the years 1780-81-82*, Vol. 2. Accessed 3 Aug 2020.

Although both natural phenomena played on the imaginations of many who saw them, the sight and sound of Niagara proved to be the most significant throughout the nineteenth century. Sometime between 1831 and 1845, Heinrich composed a programmatic symphonic work inspired by the Falls, which he called *The War of Elements and the Thundering of Niagara*. This was not the first time the cataract's roar was portrayed in music. The Norwegian violinist and composer Ole Bull (1810-1880) wrote a piece for violin solo and orchestra entitled *Niagara* in 1844. Later representations of the falls include William Henry Fry's *Niagara Symphony* (1854) and George Frederick Bristow's *Niagara: Symphony for Grand Orchestra and Chorus* (1893). Denise Von Glahn asserts that that Heinrich, Fry, and Bristow "attempted to capture what no visual artist could; their works celebrated the powerful *sound* heard at the Falls" (23).

The intensity of sound produced by the 3,160 tons of water that flows over Niagara Falls every second is referenced in many of the accounts of its visitors. However, exaggerated tales of its deafening sublimity spread to the extent that by the 1720s, it was commonly assumed that the Falls overpowered all other sounds for approximately a thirty-mile radius (Dudley 575).

Exaggerations of the Falls' power only bolstered its sublime reputation throughout the nineteenth century. Works like Heinrich's *Thundering of Niagara* symbolize his admiration for the seemingly uncontrollable power of the natural world. While both visual artists, poets, and composers preserved their admiration for the Falls through their respective artistic media, Von Glahn observes that music attempted to do what no other medium could: mimic the sounds of the falls themselves (23). Perhaps the most iconic painting of the Falls from the middle of the nineteenth century is Frederic Edwin Church's *Niagara* (1857) (See Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Church, Frederic Edwin. "Niagara". 1857. Oil on Canvas. Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington. Accessed 3 August 2020.

Church's painting is the first visual representation of the Falls in a "grand scale, with such fine detail, naturalism, and immediacy" ("Niagara"). The canvas is 101.6 × 229.9 cm (40 × 90 1/2 in.), twice as wide as it is high. Sheer dimension heightens the panoramic expansiveness of the scene ("Niagara"). In spite of its scale and perspective, Church's painting lacks one of the principal characteristics of the Falls – its sound. An anonymous observer at the exhibition of the work in 1857 aptly declared, "This is Niagara, with the roar left out!" (Mathews et al. 56).¹³

Church's Niagara is incapable of producing the sound of the Falls by itself; however, it suggests the presence of imagined sound. However, Church's painting will "sound" different to someone who has only a cursory knowledge of the Falls than to someone who has experienced the cataract first hand. The resulting sensory, and as such, emotional experience, can vary greatly. How then, does an artist make the intentional experience of the sublime reproducible?

To answer this question, some artists turned to language to reinforce the intent of their art. Predating Church by thirty-two years is Edward Hicks's *The Falls of Niagara* (1825) (Fig. 3). While the scope of the painting is not as considerable as Church's, Hicks seems to obscure the Falls with images of a beaver, rattlesnake, eagle, and moose among a variety of trees and shrubs. Hicks places a greater emphasis on sound. An excerpt from a poem by Alexander Wilson encompasses the scene and includes direct references to the sonic nature of the Falls.

With uproar hideous' first the Falls appear,
The stunning tumult thundering on the ear.
Above, below, where'er the astonished eye
Turns to behold, new opening wonders lie,
This great o'erwhelming work of awful Time
In all its dread magnificence sublime,
Rises on our view, amid a crashing roar
That bids us kneel, and Time's great God adore (A. Wilson 74-75).

Hicks's inclusion of Alexander Wilson's poem invites the observer to hear the "hideous" and "crashing" roar and experience the "thundering on the ear".

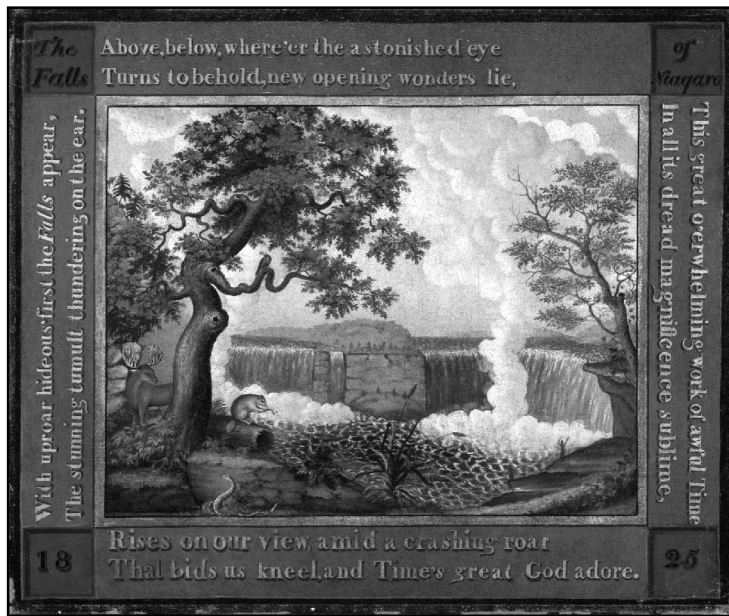


Fig. 3. Hicks, Edward. "The Falls of Niagara". 1825. Oil on Canvas. Courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Accessed 3 August 2020.

Heinrich's *The War of the Elements and the Thundering of Niagara* (1831-45) occupies a position between Hicks' sound-encircled folk-art and Church's water-dominant, yet silent and motionless canvas. What Heinrich achieved is not a simultaneous experience like Hicks's painting where the falls are experienced all at one, but a successive experience that pulls the observer from one moment to the next through the musical events of the composition. Heinrich's Niagara overcomes limitations of movement and sound through music and takes on additional symbolism.

Heinrich's "Cappriccio Grande", the *Thundering of Niagara* is scored for a full orchestra with augmented brass and percussion sections. In addition to winds and strings, the score calls for three piccolos, four horns, four trumpets, and alto, tenor, and bass trombones. Heinrich's percussive forces include parts for timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, and tambourine. The thirty individual parts often play together at the same time, heightening a sense of acoustic sublimity. The approximately eleven-minute work is written as a single movement; however, frequent fermatas, grand pauses, and tempo changes divide the work into smaller sections: (Adagio largo, Allegro moderato, Poco piu mosso, Andantino, Allegro primo, and Allegro Coda). Closer analysis shows Heinrich's awareness of large-scale forms and his effort to create unity throughout the work. Harmonic, textural, and rhythmic motives recall previous moments, thus creating a sense of internal consistency. The composer's evocation of "thundering" occurs in the work's "semi-autonomous" coda (mm. 333-507) which accounts for over one-third of the work (Van Glahn 27). The Coda begins softly but this tranquility soon gives way to *forte*, *fortissimo*, and triple *forte* dynamics that persist to the end of the work.

Heinrich's perspective of Niagara is that of a downward gaze. This perspective became the prominent viewpoint of the Hudson River School of painters like Cole and Durand

discussed earlier. Brooks Toliver notes that this perspective celebrates both wilderness and the will to dominate it (342). Here the sublime manifests through Heinrich's response to the power of the falls. The triple-forte dynamics, droning brass, and constantly running scales assume the roaring sound of constantly falling water. This intensity and persistence of sound overtakes the listener much like getting hit with a wave; as Von Glahn writes, "the power of the Falls becomes the music" (34). The wildness of the scene threatens to destroy. However, Heinrich keeps the experience under his control, symbolically asserting his own power over that of nature. The cataract's reputation as an American phenomenon, coupled with Heinrich's self-promotion as an American composer identifies the power of conquest represented in the music as American power. Rob Wilson's comment that the sublime is a "genre of empowerment" comes alive in Heinrich's portrayal of Niagara Falls (169). The ceaseless flow of the water represented by rising and falling scales becomes the perpetual forward momentum, or Manifest Destiny, of the United States. The thundering roar of the Falls represented by Heinrich's densely constructed walls of sound becomes the booming voice of the American people and their leaders, even the voice of God. This assertion of natural, cultural, political, and economic power underpins the American sublime.¹⁴

VI. Conclusion

The sublime is not a "delightful or contemplative experience of nature" (Brady 180). Emily Brady asserts that "the sublime does not define a relationship of loving nature, or even a friendly relationship with nature", instead it is "uncomfortable, even difficult" (180). This type of relationship is evident in Heinrich's symphonies in which he was dealing with something much larger than himself: the concept of America. For Heinrich, mountains, rivers, waterfalls, and people defined what the United States was and where it originated. Heinrich as Self confronted this new world and the exotic otherness that it represented. The internal and external sense of displacement he experienced with North American people and places, and the criticism heaped upon him disrupted his perception of the symphony and Western music generally. As a result, Heinrich dedicated his compositional career to grappling with his primary autobiographical question: the disruption between Self and Other, internal and external, old and new, European and American, culture and nature. Although discrepancies of taste among his sympathizers and his critics rendered almost all of his music inconsequential during his lifetime, many of Heinrich's works remain accurate representations of American thought and emotion during the early nineteenth century. Chmaj unashamedly declares that, "[Heinrich] is the one composer who tried to do for American music what the landscape painters did for painting, the Nature writer for literature, and to make that attempt with the orchestra" (55). Beyond Chmaj's hyperbole, indeed Heinrich's contributions should be regarded along the same lines as those of his contemporaries, namely Bryant, Cole, and Church. Their alignment of natural sublimity with wildness, power, and antiquity as expressed on canvas, in prose, and in music contributed to and accurately reflected the sense of American exceptionalism that defined what it meant to be authentically American.

Notes

- ¹ The condition of music in the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century reflected “postcolonial anxiety” of the nation. Much of the music was imported from Europe which resulted in a cosmopolitan type atmosphere and national cultural ambiguity. For a detailed analysis of the condition of American music during Heinrich’s lifetime see Douglas W. Shadle, *Orchestrating the Nation: The Nineteenth-Century American Symphonic Enterprise*, 2016.
- ² Heinrich conducted the first known performance of a Beethoven symphony in America (Symphony no. 1) on November 12, 1817 in Lexington, Kentucky.
- ³ I use the terms natural, nature, and landscape throughout this chapter and elsewhere to refer to the romanticized perception of the natural world within the North American continent including forests, mountains, rivers, prairies, etc. This is in contrast to areas that have been settled or industrialized through cultivation or infrastructure. While there are different sub-categories of landscapes (cityscapes, farmscapes, mountainscapes), I use the term landscape to refer to the way that is was used throughout the nineteenth century, specifically “a portion of land or territory which the eye can comprehend in a single view, including mountains, rivers, lakes, and whatever the land contains”. See Noah Webster, “Landscape”, in *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1882), <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/landscape>.
- ⁴ While the term “American” can be problematic because of its multiple definitions and subjectivity, I use the term throughout this chapter as it refers to the way Heinrich would have recognized it. Noah Webster’s 1828 dictionary defines American as “A native of America; originally applied to the aboriginals, or copper-colored races, found here by the Europeans; but now applied to the descendants of Europeans born in America”. Webster also quotes George Washington in his definition, “The name *American* must always exalt the pride of patriotism”. As such, “American” here refers to the white citizens of European decent. Indigenous people, although originally called Americans, would not be considered American citizens at this time and were thus perceived as Other.
- ⁵ Sixty enslaved people worked on the 550-acre Farmington plantation at the time Heinrich lived there. Heinrich dedicated several works to members of the Speed family or honored the Farmington estate: *Farmington March*, *Visit to Farmington*, *Farewell to Farmington*, *Hail to Kentucky*, and *The Birthday of Washington*. The latter was commissioned by John Speed.
- ⁶ The quoted passage originally appeared in “City Items”. *New York Daily Times*, 7 May 1846.
- ⁷ Other notable figures during the nineteenth century promoted their log-cabin origins for various political and artistic means. Figures include Henry David Thoreau, William Henry Harrison, and Franklin Pierce.
- ⁸ Heinrich referred to his time in Kentucky as his “hermitage”. Consider also Henry David Thoreau (1817-1962) and his cabin experience at Walden Pond. from 1845 to 1847.
- ⁹ Schonberg’s statement recalls the concept of instrumental music as religion that became popular during the nineteenth century, particularly regarding the music of Beethoven and Wagner. Virinder S. Kalra observes that, “This notion of music as religion was developed through a process of elevation of the [musical] work through theological interpretative frameworks; artists became priests mediating the absolute for the public and concert halls of the new churches” (25).
- ¹⁰ Emphasis is original.
- ¹¹ The quote comes from a letter written by John Braham to Heinrich (Anthony Philip Heinrich *Scrapbook*, 425).
- ¹² Purchased by Thomas Jefferson from England in 1774 for twenty shillings, Natural Bridge soon became a tourist destination for Europeans during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Jefferson referred to the bridge as “the most Sublime of nature’s works”. The arch was painted by numerous times throughout the nineteenth century. Notable artists include Jacob Caleb Ward in 1835, Frederic Edwin Church in 1852, and David Johnson in 1860. Herman Melville alludes to the arch in his novel, *Moby Dick*, comparing a breaching whale to its characteristic curve. American literary figure, William Cullen Bryant, referred to Natural Bridge and Niagara Falls as the two most remarkable features of North America.

¹³ The quoted passage originally appeared in *Home Journal*, May 9, 1857, 2. Italics are original to the article.

¹⁴ Non-American composers have also used waterfalls to musically allude to national rhetoric. Jón Leifs' *Dettifoss* (1964) is a more recent expression of nationalism through referencing a natural phenomenon.

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The Sublime in Mircea Eliade's Fiction

MARINICA TIBERIU SCHIOPU

Abstract

The present paper is dealing with the diversity of manifestations of the sublime in Mircea Eliade's fictional works. The internationally renowned historian of religions included several representations of the sublime in his writings, either religious or mythological. Literary critics mainly researched the sacred and the profane in Eliade's work and they have not focused on the sublime. In the novels *Bengal Nights* and *Isabel and the Devil's Waters* or short stories such as *Nights at Serampore* or *The Secret of Dr Honigberger*, the author used several Indian mythological and religious elements which generated a sublime state to readers. In some other writings (*The Forbidden Forest*, *Miss Christina* etc.), Eliade recycled myths and symbols from Romanian mythology, having the same target. This study aims at exploring and classifying the different types of sublime in Mircea Eliade's writings. The analysis will be based on hermeneutics, close reading, narratology and semiotics.

Keywords: Eliade, mythology, profane, sacred, sublime.

I. Introduction: Different Perspectives on the Sublime over Time

The *sublime*, as a fundamental aesthetic category, has been understood and defined in a variety of ways, sometimes it was misunderstood, generated a state of equivocity and proved itself as versatile:

"The history of the sublime, as the history of many crucial notions for the humanities, may be seen and understood as a history of misreadings of the past. There is something ironic and perverse in the contemporary – postmodern – renaissance of the sublime. The almost two-thousand-year-old world history of the sublime is then full of insinuations, ambiguities, and sudden pauses" (Kenneth and Pluciennik 2002: 719).

Philip Shaw emphasized the variety of applications of this notion, from the gross reality to the most refined states of mind: "A building or a mountain may be sublime, as may a thought, a heroic deed, or a mode of expression. But the definition of the sublime is not restricted to value judgements; it also describes a state of mind" (Shaw 2006: 1).

Jane Forsey, starting from Guy Sircello's doubt about the possibility of a theory of the sublime, noticed the increasing interest in the sublime shown by the contemporary literary theoreticians and critics:

"The aesthetic notion of the sublime has had a great deal in the last decade or so engendering monographs by Paul Crowther, Jean-François Lyotard, and Kirk Pillow, critical anthologies from Dabney Townsend and from Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, and numerous journal articles, conference panels and symposia. The renewal of interest is perhaps: a notion that conjures up the inexplicable, the overwhelming, and the horrendous may be well suited to the current age" (Forsey 2007: 381).

The conclusion drawn by Forsey is that: "the sublime, we have seen, cannot be an object of experience, but neither it can be a description of the cognitive failure of a given subject. If it is to deal only with some feeling or emotive state, it devolves to a theory whatsoever" (*ibidem*: 388). Gillian B. Pierce, in the introduction to *The Sublime Today: Contemporary Readings in the Aesthetic*, offered a possible answer for the revival of the research on this aesthetic notion and its relevance in the contemporary world: "Why the sublime? Given the magnitude of the problems confronting us today in the political, financial and economic spheres, this dynamic, which describes the experience of the human subject confronting and trying to make sense of that which lies beyond the horizon of his or her comprehension, seems particularly relevant" (Pierce 2012: 1).

The sublime represents a central aesthetic category designating a particular experience due to a work of art, different from the category of *the beautiful*, although, "the sublime has been seen alternatively as part of, and in contrast to, the beautiful, but always associated with feelings of awe and exceptionality" (Cavanaugh 2014: 57). *The sublime* is characterised by a psychic tension which exalts and attains the highest degree of completion, beauty, elevation in the hierarchy of the moral, aesthetic and intellectual values. The analysed category became important in the XVIII century when Edmund Burke published *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), in which the author made a distinction between *the sublime* and *the beautiful*. The *beautiful* is possible only in the context of love or other similar feelings and represents the capacity to like, which transgresses towards tradition and utility. The *sublime* is driven towards notions such as terror and enchantment. Strong emotions and jams, terrible elements which act similarly to fear, the passions that bind society can be considered primary sources of the sublime. Starting from the natural sublime one reaches the feeling of wonder, the spectator being affected by what he/she sees, his/her mind being totally absorbed by its object. In the treatise *On the Sublime* (the oldest writing on this aesthetic category), Pseudo-Longinus (I century BCE) described *the sublime* as a supreme elevation, a metaphysical revelation, an ecstatic state of amazement, miracle, heaviness, ardour as a result of the concentration of energies, visions and creative tensions. Criticising the exuberant style and the rhetoric of Caecilius from Kale Akte, Longinus pleaded for the cultivation of passion. The writer's mission is, according to Longinus, to generate a state of ecstasy and miracle using the discursive techniques he or she possesses. Longinus's *sublime* refers to feelings of admiration or worship caused by the greatness of the outstanding actions of heroes or by other events which arouse grandiose spiritual tensions. The literary qualities of the text which communicates the sublime should be: the laconism and the expressiveness achievable in the short and dazzling fragments even in some long poems. *Peri hypsous* (*On the Sublime*) is considered the second most influential ancient treatise, after Aristotle's *Poetics*, "in terms of its influence on modern literary criticism, aesthetics, and the philosophy of art" (Doran 2015: 27).

Immanuel Kant, in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), analysed the *sublime* from another perspective, as different from the *beautiful*. He distinguished the following types of sublime: "the mathematically and the dynamically sublime, which relate respectively to nature vastness and power" (Crawford 2013: 51). Dale Jacquette stated, regarding Schopenhauer's standpoint on *the sublime*, that: "the subject in moments of aesthetic appreciation become so absorbed in the experience of beauty or the sublime as to momentarily forget all concerns of the will, transfixed by aesthetic fascination beyond the willful need of self-interest and desire" (Jacquette 2013: 69).

The transition from the *beautiful* towards the *sublime* (and the propensity for the last one) marked the shift from Neoclassicism to Romanticism. Among the Romantic writers, the sublime was perceived and defined differently. Coleridge “believed that certain objects, such as the stars, were naturally fit to represent sublimity, and that in art the sublime did not depend upon large gestures or the prominence of the sensuous symbol [...] Like Richter, Herder, as well as Richard Payne Knight, one of Burke’s main opponents in England, he rejected pain as a basis for the sublime” (Modiano 1978: 118-119). Matthew C. Borushko noticed that one of the consequences of the sublime in Shelley’s work is represented by a form of *selflessness*:

“There is, in other words, a loss of self-possession involved in the Shelleyan sublime; more precisely, the sublime loss of self is exchanged for the illusion of aesthetic gain, or, the illusion that is aesthetic gain. Indeed, Shelley leaves us without a doubt that the feeling of imaginative power is a momentary illusion, completing the description with the attribution of power to Nature [...]” (Borushko 2013: 228).

For Wordsworth the *beautiful* and the *sublime* can be the simultaneous characteristics of an object, the prevalence of one of them depends on the spectator’s perspective:

“He was [...] also interested in the beautiful, but there is no detail of importance given in the fragment on that topic except the observations that the same object may be both sublime and beautiful, and that in attending to the beautiful we give more attention to the parts of the object than we do when we attend to the sublime” (Owen 1973: 71).

Researching *the beautiful* and *the sublime* in Virginia Woolf’s work, Patrick Colm Hogan noticed a link between *sublimity* and *loneliness*: “Whereas beauty is connected with a sense of overcoming solitude through attachment, sublimity is connected with existential loneliness” (Colm Hogan 2016: 40). Daniel T. O’Hara classified the *sublime* in Virginia Woolf’s writings as “modern sublime” (O’Hara 2015: 3) and described it as an “uncanny experience of undergoing the sudden return of an identification with an apparently surmounted power that makes us feel, momentarily, both helpless and somehow its author” (*ibidem*: 8).

Recently, Michael Shapiro, in *The Political Sublime*, spoke about numerous types of sublime which resonate with the realities of the contemporary world: “the political sublime”, “the nuclear sublime”, “the industrial sublime” or “the racial sublime” (Shapiro 2018). The vastness and the ubiquity of economics, for the contemporary theoreticians, seem to generate a sense of sublimity:

“A vast and worrisome source of ambivalent pleasure. The possibility of delight beyond the assimilable, of being overtaken, rendered dumbstruck, flattened by surprise, all rendered palpable by an intermingling of indefinable fear. This admixture of the uplifting and the overwhelming is the stuff, of course, of the (Western) aesthetic sublime, at least those notions of the sublime that can be traced back to the Enlightenment writings of such diverse thinkers as Joseph Addison, Frances Hutcheson, Edmund Burke, and, of course, Immanuel Kant” (Amariglio et alii 2009: 1).

Because of the many perspectives on this aesthetic category generated over time, *the sublime* was considered “one of the most important and one of the most elusive aesthetic concepts” (Townsend 2006: 308). Nowadays, the notion of the sublime is also explored from the perspective of environmental studies, indigenous studies or geography. It still stimulates debates among theoreticians not only from the field of humanities but also from the area of politics, economics etc.

II. A Possible Classification of the Sublime in Mircea Eliade's Writings

Mircea Eliade used a variety of themes and topics in his fictional writings, many of them being rooted in his keen interest in world religions and mythologies. *Time* and *space* represented two of the most explored topics in Eliade's works, the author paying special attention to the *sacred* and the *profane* time and space. Besides these two literary categories, the Romanian writer recycled some mythological characters/symbols in his work as well (for instance *the vampire* in *Miss Christina* or the symbol of *snake* in the short-story *The Snake*).

The sublimity in Eliade's fiction presents three main roots: *religion*, *mythology* and *nature*. Thus, one can distinguish three types of the *sublime*: *the religious sublime*, *the mythological sublime* and *the natural sublime*.

III. The Religious Sublime

The religious aspect of humans' life is related to the depth of their inner world and the vastness of the outer space, generating a sense of sublimity:

"Religion does not have a home or a place in any of the commonly demarcated spheres of human activity, which is why the attempt to locate a determinative space for religion has become impossible. As the depth dimension of any or all of these functions of human living, however, religion represents the limits of each function. As the depth dimension of individual faculties or functions, religion appears as sublime, because one can identify a sphere or phenomenon as religious only when its self-representation breaks down" (Crockett 2001: 103).

The *religious* or *sacred sublime* can be identified in *Bengal Nights* (1933), *The Secret of Dr Honigberger* (1940), or *With the Gypsy Girls* (1963) etc.

In *Bengal Nights*, Mircea Eliade combined, as usual, the sacred and the profane in the symbolic wedding scene:

"Maitreyi continued, however, with a simplicity that finally won me. She spoke to the water, to the star-filled sky, to the forest, to the earth. She pressed the grass hard with her clenched fists, which held the ring and made her vow: 'I swear by you, Earth, that I will be Allan's and his alone. I will grow in him, like the earth grows in you. As you wait for rain, I will wait for him and his body will be like the rays of the sun to me. I swear in your presence that our union will be fertile, because I love him from my own free will. Let none of the harm that comes, if it comes, fall on him but on me alone, who chose him. You listen to me, Mama Earth, and you tell me the truth. If I am dear to you as you are to me, this moment, with my hand, with the ring, give me the strength to love him forever, to give him a joy that others do not know, a life full of richness and joy' (Eliade 1994: 108).

The sublime that the reader experiences after reading this passage is related to the sacralised cosmos that *homo religiosus* designed. According to Eliade's theory, "[...] the earth was not conceived only as source of agrarian fertility. As complementary power to the sky, it revealed itself to be an integral part of the cosmic totality" (Eliade 1982: 12). Thus, Maitreyi not only considers Mother Earth as a witness of her love and her vow but also a patronal goddess. For Allan, Maitreyi was a primitive: "She seemed a child, a primitive" (Eliade 1994: 32) and Eliade considered that the primitive was a *homo religiosus* par excellence, who "can live only in a sacred space" (Eliade 1961: 55). Maitreyi's attitude is a pantheistic one, calling all the natural elements to witness her love and to protect it on the basis of the relationship between nature and deities, as David S. Shields stated:

“the religious sublime represents nature only to dissolve it and discover the divine power animating it” (Shields 1984: 241). The sublimity of this moment consists of the combination of worship and fear; because of the fear of any possible harm, the young girl asks the Earth to secure her love.

The metaphysical dimension of the short-story *The Secret of Dr Honigberger* generates a sense of sublimity due to the occult practices that the doctor experienced. The passion for the Indian mysticism led Dr Zerlendi on the path of yoga. The *religious sublime* builds itself gradually during the investigation of the narrator, while new evidence of the use of yoga practice is found, and it is directly linked to the quest of the *Absolute*. Dr Zerlendi, researching Dr Honigberger’s interest for mysticism, transgresses the historical time, entering another dimension. The three main characters of this short-story are masters of the sacred, heroes who are searching and who understand what they are searching for. Dr Zerlendi’s secret diary is the proof of an initiated person who discovered how to escape the time maintaining the continuum of consciousness, thus, his diary could be considered the evidence of the escape from the common time, maintaining his lucidity. *The Secret of Dr Honigberger* has an important intertextual component: it is built upon the real Dr Honigberger’s book *Thirty-five Years in the Orient*, as the narrator indicates: “I must admit that at that time I knew very little about Dr Johann Honigberger. I recall reading, many years before, his principal work *Thirty-five Years in the East*, in an English translation, the only one which had been available to me in Calcutta” (Eliade 1970: 67). The analysed work can be considered a piece of detective fiction which encompasses a metaphysical theme that Eugen Simion considered: “the favourite theme in his mythical prose after 1945: the escape from time and space using the yoga practice” (Simion 2011: 189). This theme is captivating for the three scholars (Honigberger, Zerlendi and the narrator) and the narrator expresses his fascination for it, which can be a sublime feeling: “At that moment I too felt myself enthralled by a strange enchantment I never had felt before” (Eliade 1970: 94). The religious sublime in *The Secret of Dr Honigberger* is doubled by a mythological one.

In the short-story *With the Gypsy Girls* (1959), the *sublime* consists of strange events which bring the piano teacher – Gavrilesco – out of the historical time, the main character being involved in a hierophany, a manifestation of the sacred into the profane. The entrance in the sacred time is presented by the narrator as a bewildering transgression from the heat of Bucharest into the coolness of the Gypsies’ hovel (a representation of the labyrinth): “In the shade of the walnut tree, he was bathed in an unexpected, unnatural coolness, and Gavrilesco stood there a moment, bewildered but smiling” (Eliade 1981: 68-69). The sublimity of the transgression into the sacred dimension has a powerful effect on Gavrilesco who suffers a transformation:

“It was a room whose limits he could not see, for the curtains were drawn, and in the semidarkness the screens looked like the walls. He started to walk forward into the room, treading on carpets each one thicker and softer than the last, as if he were stepping on mattresses, and at every step his heart beat faster, until finally he was afraid to go any farther, and he stopped. At the moment he suddenly felt happy, as if he had become young again, and the whole world was his” (*ibidem*: 71-72).

Gavrilescu went through several rooms symbolising the passing from real to unreal, the eight episodes of the story met a symmetrical number of transgressions between sacred and profane. Eugen Simion considered these passings of the main character from an existence to another as “an allegory of death or the passing towards death (Simion 2011: 211).

Thus, the *religious sublime* is related to the transgression from profane to sacred and to the fear/love towards the divine, being a characteristic of *homo religiosus*.

IV. The Mythological Sublime

Mircea Eliade was highly interested in the study of myths and, as a consequence, he recycled several myths pertaining to different religious systems in his literary works. In *Myth and Reality*, Eliade made clear the semantics of myth:

"For the past fifty years at least, Western scholars have approached the study of myth from a viewpoint markedly different from, let us say, that of the nineteenth century. Unlike their predecessors, who treated myth in the usual meaning of the word, that is, as 'fable', 'invention', 'fiction', they have accepted it as it was understood in the archaic societies, where, on the contrary, 'myth' means a 'true story' and, beyond that, a story that is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, significant" (Eliade 1963: 1).

The author inserted several mythological elements in his short stories and novels, but only the mythologically-trained reader could decipher them. In *With the Gypsy Girls*, Eliade used the myth of the *labyrinth*, represented by the Gypsies' house where Gavrilesco was led by the girls. This journey was bewildering, frightening, and ecstatic at the same time for the main character, generating a sublime state of mind. The mythological substrate of the short story is obvious: the old woman is an equivalent of Cerberus, the three girls might be related to the Romanian mythological creatures called *iele*, the number three is highly used by the author, having an important symbolic value. Gavrilesco takes a journey through time, the mythological time, being guided by the Gypsies. The main character entered a labyrinth of old things going through it in a vague state of mind (neither dream nor vigil):

"'Let me pass!' he cried. 'I told you to let me pass!'. Again someone or something, a creature or an object whose nature he could not determine, touched him on the face and shoulders; at that he began whirling his shalwars blindly over his head in an effort to defend himself. He felt hotter and hotter, he could feel the drops of sweat trickling down his cheeks, and he was gasping for breath" (Eliade 1970: 86-87).

In *Miss Christina*, Eliade recycled the Romanian myth of the *vampire* (*strigoi* is the traditional term for the *vampire* in Romanian), combining the fantastic and the supernatural to generate a sublime state for the reader. This is achieved by using some antinomies such as being and non-being, reality and non-reality, dream and vigil etc. The use of ambiguity is a favourite strategy of Mircea Eliade in his literary work, as a main characteristic of fiction. Published in 1936, *Miss Christina* started a new stage in Eliade's literary work, a phase characterized by a massive insertion of fantastic, symbols and myths in his writings. Catalin Ghita emphasized the importance of terror for the action of this short novel, contributing to the increment of the sublimity of this writing: "I speak of 'terror', rather than 'horror', in the case of Mircea Eliade's *Miss Christina* for the main reason that the plot seems to provoke anxiety, not revulsion. The main element contributing to this effect is, without any doubt, narrative atmosphere" (Ghita 2013: 59). The same scholar considered this short novel as a main representative of the Romanian Gothic:

"Miss Christina retains from the above-listed features of Romanian Gothic several defining motifs: the isolated country manor, erected in the eerie Danube Plains, the bizarre domestics, the neurotic hosts, the protagonist whose state of mind becomes increasingly erratic and his more down-to-earth sidekick, whose role, though minor by comparison, helps to

establish the mental balance of the hero etc. Certainly, the most complex character of the novel is its eponymous hero, Christina. Eliade proves that the vampire can be not only an agent of destruction and ontological corruption, but also a vehicle carrying an essentially incommunicable and ungraspable sense of transcendence, a reification of 'the beyond'. Her thirst for blood is a substitute for a more refined craving, involving love' (Ghita 2017: 109).

In *The Secret of Dr Honigberger*, the *religious sublime* is doubled by the *mythological* one. The idea of a mythical and utopian/heavenly land triggers a sense of sublime in readers – Shambhala:

"For thousands of years rumours and reports have circulated among the cognoscenti of the nations suggesting that somewhere beyond Tibet, among the icy peaks and secluded valleys of Central Asia, there lies an inaccessible paradise, a place of universal wisdom and ineffable peace called Shambhala – although it is also known by other names. It is inhabited by adepts from every race and culture who form an inner circle of humanity secretly guiding its evolution. In that place, so the legends say, sages have existed since the beginning of human history in a valley of supreme beatitude that is sheltered from the icy arctic winds and where the climate is always warm and temperate, the sun always shines, the gentle airs are always beneficent and nature flowers luxuriantly" (LePage 1996: 4).

The excitement and the enchantment of the narrator in *The Secret of Dr Honigberger* when he discovered a note in one of Doctor's papers, could be considered a sublime experience: "There were only a couple of words but they filled me with excitement. *Shambhala = Agarththa = the invisible realm* [...] I returned to the house the next day earlier than usual. Never before have I entered the library as excited and curious as I was now" (Eliade 1970: 90). The myth of Shambhala or Shangri-la has always generated a sublime state of mind to people, especially to Buddhists. The detective plot of *The Secret of Dr Honigberger* is hiding a metaphysical theme and the occult events are related to sublimity. James Hilton was interested in the story of this pure land as well and wrote a novel (*Lost Horizon*) based on this Asian myth.

The Forbidden Forest is a profound mythical novel in which the main character, Stephan Viziru, is trying to escape the historical time; thus, the reader is following his quest to enter the mythical time, the round time. The novel is based on the daily reality which opens secret doors to another dimension, to a mythical world. The universe in Eliade's novel is open, it is pervious to transcendence and salvation. The idea of transcending our prime reality implies a feeling of sublimity and the hero's way to escape history is to die: "He had known that last unending moment would be enough for himself"¹ (Eliade 2007: 291).

V. The Natural Sublime

If the previous two types of sublime are related to culture, the third one is linked to the natural environment in which people live and project their spiritual creation. Although, through scientific and technological progress humans transform nature, generating a shift from the natural or ecological sublime to the industrial or digital sublime, the primary bond between human beings and the natural environment is still functional:

"If nature's sublimity has traditionally been defined in large part by its permanence, its sovereignty, its inviolability, then the decline of this version of the sublime should be cause for concern. Undoubtedly, the fact that through technological advances we do have more control over nature than ever before has contributed to the antiquation of the traditional natural sublime. Furthermore, in addition to altering fundamentally our relationship with

the natural world, technology has assumed an integral role in the ideology of the sublime as it informs that relationship. The sublime is not disappearing along with the disappearance of wild nature; its grounds are merely shifting" (Hitt 1999: 618-619).

Nature has always influenced humans' feelings, either the natural beauty or the destructive power of nature has generated a sublime state in human beings' minds and souls: "rather than being left behind, or indeed being substitutable, natural objects engage the mental powers and maintain the type of activity that grounds the mix of pleasure and displeasure characteristic of the sublime response" (Brady 2012: 101-102).

The miracle and the mystery of nature have a great impact on the two lovers in *Bengal Nights* and the description of a walk through the forest is the best occasion for Eliade to catch the sublimity of the grandeur of nature. The dance of fireflies and the performance of all the elements of nature seems to remind of the cosmic dance (*Lila*) to the reader:

"Chabu, Maitreyi and I set off to explore the forest. The moonless summer night was alight with all the stars of Bengal; fireflies descended on our faces, our shoulders, our necks, like the living jewels of some folk-tale. We did not speak. Little by little, Maitreyi and I moved closer to each other, frightened that Chabu might see us, but encouraged by the silence and the darkness. I do not know what unknown state of being awoke in me, in response to that undreamt – of India stretching out before me. The forest seemed without beginning, without end. The sky veiled itself behind ageless eucalyptus trees, the eye unable to distinguish between the fireflies and the tiny, faraway stars. We stopped at the edge of a pond, all three of us silent. What spells were being woven in those closed lotus petals, in that motionless, soundless water which reflected of a thousand points of gold? Relentlessly, I forced myself to keep awake, to resist the enchantment of the fable that surrounded us. The rational being inside me was floundering in the unreality and the sanctity of our presence at the edge of that silent lake. The state of ecstasy lasted for what seemed an age. I did not speak" (Eliade 1994: 98-99).

The narrator-hero, Allan, expressed his amazement and bliss at the beauty of nature, the powerful effect of the natural sublime on the character consists of silence, contemplation and a feeling of transcendence. The picture of India's natural landscape depicted by Allan is so vivid and engaging for readers and its sublimity invites the reader to reverie and meditation. The purity of nature is doubled by the innocence of Maitreyi's love for Allan. Thus, the scenery resonates with the lovers' feelings.

The same situation is presented in *Nights at Serampore*, where the narrator and his companions take a walk in the forest and India's nature overwhelms them:

"As usual, as soon as we arrived we ordered the servants to get supper ready, while we set off for a walk around the pond. It was the next-to-last night before full moon. We walked along as if in a daze, intoxicated by that invisible cloud of odours which enveloped us even more powerfully the deeper we went into the forest of coconut palms. Whether because of the unexpected encounter with Suren, or because of the charm of the moonlit atmosphere, we were shaken and unsettled. The silence had now become uncanny, and it seemed as though all nature were holding its breath under the spell of the moon. The shaking of a branch made us tremble too, so unnatural did sound and movement seem to us in this extraordinary universal standstill" (Eliade 1970: 18).

Eliade manifested a propensity to place the mysterious events in the middle of the forest, which could be seen as a natural occurrence of the myth of the labyrinth. The scenery and the occult events strengthen the sublimity of the writing, increasing the reader's suspense. The similarities between the landscapes depicted by the narrator in

the two above-mentioned writings are striking: the coconut forests are both located in Bengal, the mystery of the night is intensified by the moon (by its presence or absence), the setting influences the characters' emotions, reaching the peak of the sublime.

Nature is an unceasing source of beauty and sublimity, representing one of the most frequently chosen settings for the events which generate sublime feelings/states of mind.

Conclusion

Mircea Eliade's writings usually deal with mystery, fantastic or occultism, creating the proper atmosphere for the occurrence of the sublime. I identified three main types of the sublime in the fictional work of the Romanian writer: the religious, the mythological and the natural sublime. All of them are related and caused by the main specialization of Eliade as a historian of religions. His entire literary work contains numerous religious elements, Mircea Eliade often used *hierophany* to insert these elements in his short stories and novels. The mythological sublime can be demarcated from the religious sublime by the absence of the divine in the first one and by the intensive usage of myths. The natural or the ecological sublime in Eliade's fiction is generated by the grandeur of nature and it is often linked to the previous two types of sublime, the natural environment representing the setting of the majority of hierophanies. The author inserted in his literary works all the topics that he was interested in from the History of religions: the sacred and the profane, the linear and the circular time, the transcendence of reality, myths and nature etc. All these topics that Eliade recycled in his fictional writing gave a special and distinct profile to his literary work.

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Notes

¹ My translation from Romanian.

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On Compassion and the Sublime Black Body: Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower*

IKEA M. JOHNSON

"It sounds like a combination of Buddhism, existentialism, Sufism and I don't know what else"

(*Parable of the Sower* 234)

"Each of our cells contain the code of an interrelated web of life. This biological phenomenon is constant with the teaching of interbeing voiced in the *Heart Sutra*."

(*Painting Enlightenment: Healing Visions of the Heart Sutra* 37)

There appears to be widespread agreement among literary critics that Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) is a prophetic story of speculative fiction. Though, an examination of how and why she creates these tales, interwoven with intersectional issues, Buddhism, and phenomenology, and how that influence emerges in the novel is not offered sufficiently elsewhere. This piece aims to contribute to the explanation of that process by studying the expressed behaviors and beliefs of the protagonist, Lauren, and her new theology, Earthseed. A query into her parable series reveals passages of ontological, social, and political revelation woven into the narrative of a fifteen-year-old African American girl commonly known as Lauren. Through this essay, I will show how this hybrid religion reveals the influences of the Buddhist Theravāda tradition of compassion and the sublime throughout the narrative. Here, the specific concern is the limitless reach of sublime ideas explored in the story like empathy and transformation. These notions are sublime because Lauren exists as an extreme version of herself. Butler's character embodies fluctuating ideas of philosophical explanations of what the sublime means. The hyperempathy syndrome operates as physically and psychologically extreme phenomena that involve a series of resulting changes in the hosts of this hyperempathy and the world around them.

Compassion fuses and impulses love to expand their realm; they blend and instruct deep joy to examine for new sustenance. Therefore, it enables all moments of sublimation to accumulate into truly infinite states (*appamaññā*). Compassion shields equanimity from falling into apathy and protects it from languid or insatiable withdrawal. Until equanimity has entered embodiment, compassion urges its sentient host to come into the planet's trial again, to stand the test, by solidifying and enhancing itself as a power—a superpower. Solidarity is impartiality that cannot wait for collective healing for nation-wide and international healing. This statement could not be made more evident than when witnessing Black Lives Matter protests and the governmental response, support, and lack of appropriate policy reformation to halt the enforced suffering onto the Black body by physical and sublime forces. Engaged Buddhism exemplifies an antidote to the politics

of terror, hate, turmoil, and alienation. Theravāda Buddhist beliefs hinge on human nature as impacting the growth and compression of political participation. Buddhism is a personal strategy; the second noble truth points out that the cause of suffering is in mind rather than out in the world. So, too, must each mind in the novel (*Earth*) recognize inversion of hyperempathy and flow with the billows of change.

The two-fold aim of this project is to: (a) demonstrate one way that sublime states like compassion operate in the literature as “hyperempathy” and (b) how philosophical theories about Black bodies devised by Edmund Burk, Frantz Fanon, and Immanuel Kant combine to explain how societal events affect individuals’ attitudes at different times.¹ Thirdly, this assessment will show how effectively the author’s data-collection methods and narrative in the novel provide the information needed for interpreting the Buddhist influence on sublime states throughout the narrative. The approach used in this study relies on an integration of two theories that will explain how societal conditions affect people’s beliefs and behavior throughout the novel. The first theory links to environmental (behavior systems) factors which with a person interacts. On one level, the novel is about climate change and the erosion of the planet and humanity. On another level, though, the story is about how micro-systems (patterns of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by developing person) affect the individual most intimately (Bronfenbrenner 15). The second theory has, in part, a sociohistorical foundation which explains Lauren’s development in terms of (a) the history and present conditions of the society, (b) the history of her development, and (c) ways that these two histories interact to determine her present and future beliefs, attitudes, and behavior—primarily related to the tenets of *Earthseed*. There are four propositions explored in this study that identify theory components and Lauren’s interaction: (a) social stability and change, (b) time and place, (c) intermediaries, and (d) Lauren’s developmental history. In a study of the relationship between the broader society and Lauren’s individual beliefs, it is useful to understand how her beliefs are not typical of those held in the general population. The information collected by literary analysis is summarized to show how the results enable the researcher to show how comparable and contrasting attitudes of Butler, Burke, Fanon, and others in the past or present-day involve the sublime as a mental or physical force.² This study’s final steps consist of summarizing the analysis results and proposing what those results appear to mean in terms of the bioenvironmental theory and sociohistorical aspects of the narrative.

Through Buddhist parables and Christian stories, Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* culminates in a story that offers a new understanding of some initial evaluations and philosophies of Black bodies’ sublime nature. Butler’s novel also offers opportunities to evaluate the ways laws, policies, historical memory, and science are transcendent notions to consider regarding society in literature. The eyes are crucial to Butler’s work because it is the most useful organ through Lauren’s character in transmitting the sublime ideas. “Sound doesn’t trigger [Lauren’s] sharing. [She must] see another person in pain” (Butler 132).

Likewise, Burke imagined the eyes as sense organs that transmitted sublime states to the seer. It is thus the primary organ through which the aesthetic can synchronize. So, it is overflow linked with the energy, extent, and incomprehensibility of sublime images and concepts. What makes Lauren’s power so much more complex is the psychological nature of her condition. However, Butler has referred to Lauren’s hyperempathy syndrome as a delusion; a delusion which fools her into believing she is experiencing the pain of

others. Her father thought she could overcome this deluded form of suffering. "He has always pretended, or perhaps believed, that my hyperempathy syndrome was something I could shake off and forget about" (Butler 11). Still, the delusion is complex and perplexing that it requires an entirely different set of ideas, customs, and values to overcome the delusional experiences. Delusional thoughts of suffering must become navigated differently to live with the existence of hyperempathy and to recognize its emptiness and relation back to the body. "I can't do a thing about my hyperempathy, no matter what Dad thinks or wants or wishes. I feel what I see others feeling or what I believe the hyperempathy is what the doctors call an "organic delusional syndrome" (Butler 12).

The eyes are a conduit for Lauren that sends signals to her mind to interpret others' pain as her own. As Butler has said in other interviews that she inherited certain traits and values from her mother, so too, does Lauren inherit the ability to experience the delusion of hyperempathy from intelligence enhancing drugs her mother took. "Paracetco, the small pill, the Einstein powder" (Butler 12). Furthermore, an apt essay by Anna Hinton, "Making Do with What You Don't Have: Disabled Black Motherhood in Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*," describes how Lauren's hyperempathy is a disability. The burden of hiding an invisible affliction becomes Lauren's narrative as she navigates the world as an African American with a genetically inherited condition from her mother. The body becomes the conduit for transmitting genetic memory and codes; but, it also becomes the conduit for transmitting a mentally and physically debilitating disease. What is more interesting is to consider the fact that the other sharers in the hyperempathy are also Black and people of color like Lauren. The implication of this collective group of "sharers" is that they all share the same dilemma. The narrative operates with actual perpetrators of compassion and empathy as equally capable of action, ruthlessness, uproar—an unmovable determination to throw off shackles of delusional thinking that they must remain victims of their hyperempathy syndrome.

Although Butler stated elsewhere some titles have nothing to do with the content other than marketing, this title, *Parable of the Sower*, still connects to the tale therein. In a few ways, the title acts as a guide to better understand the origin of delusion and suffering and its connection back to the body. Because Lauren's hyperempathy is a delusional response to pain, it is, therefore, a sublime notion, tangible only through experience but not demonstrable or easily reconstructed. At first, hyperempathy seems like a positive attribute. Undoubtedly, the ability to empathize on a deep physiological level with other people is good; it would infuse a sort of kindness into the world:

The sharing isn't real, after all. It isn't some magic or ESP that allows me to share the pain or the pleasure of other people. It's delusional. Even I admit that. My brother Keith used to pretend to be hurt just to trick me into sharing his supposed pain. Once he used red ink as fake blood to make me bleed. I was eleven then, and I still bled through the skin when I saw someone else bleeding. (Butler 11)

On another level, though, the hyperempathy is also a crippling aspect, and sometimes it is dangerous. This threat is also apparent when Lauren must protect herself and her group from Pyro users and criminals. For instance, if she shoots somebody and sees it happen with her eyes, she then feels the gunshot wound. As one can imagine, that is incapacitating. Nevertheless, Octavia Butler uses hyperempathy to preserve Lauren and her group because it forces Lauren to see other people as sentient beings with just as essential emotions as hers. This issue results in her being compassionate towards other people. In a world that has become worse in matters of moral humanity and civility, this

helps Lauren to discover stability and power in numbers to grow her team by essentially taking in people from the road. So, hyperempathy may cause readers to consider how one would behave toward other people if one always felt everything they are feeling. As more people become sufferers of natural disasters, the psychological and physical effects of racism and climate change, Lauren's hyperempathy and applying that to one's own life can show how to empathize with others. As a result, empathy may turn into compassion.

In an interview, Butler says she took many influences from Buddhism in the creation of the text. So, from the Buddhist parable and philosophy, I take the ideas of compassion and suffering to explain Lauren's power further; and explain why it is so useful to the Earthseed theology for the society Lauren created. The tale of *Parable of the Sower* is the book as recorded by Lauren. Every entry commences with a verse of Earthseed before diving into descriptions of Lauren's understanding of living in a world that is reeling from the devastating effects of climate change. These effects include wealth inequality, homelessness, decreased access to education, drug craving scourges, and refugee crises. Butler offers this notion through the novel: The world suffers, but most people have their eyes and ears closed to this suffering's origins. Individual grief or joy stalls their sight and deafens their ears to the plight of other people. Constrained by desire, their minds turn narrow. The result, for Butler, is a roving mad world destroyed by unhealthy and capitalistic pursuits. However, it is compassion, Lauren's hyperempathy, that serves to navigate the burden of suffering, unlocks the access to freedom, makes the narrow soul as enormous as the universe. Compassion takes away from the soul the inert tension, the paralyzing heaviness; it confers annexes to those who clench to the construct of self. Through hyperempathy, the fact of suffering remains vividly present to Lauren's mind, even when she is personally free from it. It gives her the experience of enduring suffering, thus enhancing her to meet it equipped with tenets of Earthseed when it does befall her. This debilitating power, this compassion reconciles Lauren to her future by showing her the life of others, often much harder than hers.

Also, compassion is considered a sublime state of mind in Buddhism. In Theravāda Buddhism, *karuṇā* is one of the four "divine abodes" (*brahmavihāra*), along with loving-kindness (Pāli: *mettā*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*).³ The Visuddhimagga (IX, 94) states that compassion is considered as supporting the aspect of allaying suffering. Its function dwells in not carrying others' suffering. It becomes demonstrated as non-cruelty. Its immediate trigger is to see the helplessness in those overwhelmed by suffering. It thrives when it makes cruelty diminish, and it weakens when it generates sorrow. One reason for this is because compassion is acting out a sort of hyperempathy in words and deeds. This sort of compassion results from forces of culture and law imposed on, for illustration, Lauren's body even before her conception. Reverence and compassionate understanding help Lauren act from a place of spiritual energy, rather than anxiety and reactivity. Energy becomes wasted fixated on desiring things that existed other than they are. For Lauren, a better solution than resisting reality is to put that power into "shaping change" through the Earthseed philosophy. Alternatively, in Buddhist terms, invest in the actions that belong to her.

Moreover, suffering enters the narrative in many ways, pointedly marked with Lauren's constant references to Job of the Bible: "My favorite book of the Bible is Job. I think it says more about my father's God in particular and gods in general than anything else I've ever read" (15). As someone raised in a Southern Baptist Christian and Roman Catholic

tradition for most of my life, like many African Americans, I recall this story as a staple of justification for unwarranted suffering. Job becomes burdened with tremendous forms of suffering by God and expected to not denounce his faith in God because of his tribulations. Lauren questions this tenet and devises her religion in opposition to such Christian ideas and develops more precise navigation methods of inevitable suffering. Of course, the first clue given to readers about the universality of the Earthseed religion is the title itself, *Parable of the Sower*, because it operates as a universal marker for a few different and similar stories from across the world. On one level, the parable comes from a Christian passage in Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23, and King James Version Luke 8:5-8. On another level, the story originates from a Buddhist proverb when the Buddha answered a man who asked him how he ate, to which he replied, "O Brahmin, I, too, plow and sow, and having plowed and sown, I eat." "Do you profess to be a farmer?" replied the brahmin. "Where, then, are your bullocks? Where are the seeds and the plow?" Buddha replied,

"Faith is the seed I sow: good works are the rain that fertilizes it; wisdom and modesty are the plows; my mind is the guiding-rein; earnestness is the goad I use, and exertion is my draught-ox. This plowing is plowed to destroy the weeds of illusion. The harvest it yields is the immortal fruit of liberation."⁴

The parable is from Bali, mostly in the tradition of Theravāda Buddhism.⁵ Theravāda is the initial school of Buddhism, and the Buddha's disciples proceeded with it after his passing. It centers on the sangha, the community of monks. Theravāda Buddhism proposes that nirvana is possible through reflection and separation from the world wholly. A common stylistic feature of the Buddhist canonical literature is the use of similes and parables. The hermeneutics of two truths are central to Mādhyamika dialectics and its deconstructive analysis of key metaphysical concepts, including causation, spirit, and the self. In the *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (Mūlamadhyamakakārikās), Nāgārjuna extends the notion that phenomena lack intrinsic existence to apply to the self, which is usually conceived in dependence upon the five aggregates (MMK, IX, 12). The literature of dharma (wisdom) typically does not define aspects of ordinary life related to its point. This sort of literature generally provided to leaders tends to be speculative, like in-depth knowledge. Dharma literature for a wide-ranging market tends to be nonrepresentational and conventional, like proverbial insight. The stories are uncommon in representing tenets of a venerated teacher in terms of shepherding, horticulture, and other everyday activities.

When considering Lauren's syndrome and its continuity, this parable serves as the marker for transnationalism as it connects to what I call Black-Sublimation. Black-Sublimation forces the Black body and mind to (sometimes unwillingly) shift and transform because they must navigate the crossings of social, climate, and political transitions in a system inherently designed to keep the body of color underneath capitalism's hoof. This indication is expressed through Lauren's hyperempathy as she also discerns that her natural comrades are other people of color. These people include mixed-race couples since they are susceptible to become victims of the violence of white hate groups. Several of the migrants who join Lauren's group and the society she later establishes, Acorn, turn out to be called "sharers," which is the word for others who share the hyperempathy syndrome. As a group, they collectively follow these Tenets of Earthseed and claim, "We do not worship God. We perceive and attend God. We learn from God. With forethought and work, We shape God. In the end, we yield to God. We adapt and endure, For we are Earthseed And God is Change" (17). Butler alleges that

Earthseed was a sort of apogee of many theological beliefs, including Buddhism, Taoism, and other Eastern religions. Some Western readers may mistake some ideas of Eastern religions like resiliency for complacency or passivity. However, she emphasizes these traditions that may often become lost from a Western readers perspective, is summed up in verse from Earthseed:

We are all Godseed, but no more or less so than any other aspect of the universe, Godseed is all there is—all that Changes. Earthseed is all that spreads Earthlife to new earths. The universe is Godseed. Only we are Earthseed. And the Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars. (Butler 77)

Since Buddhism is nearly an empirical process, psychological and moral, rather than philosophical or sacred, it may become evaluated by its outcomes. So, Butler emphasizes that one cannot resist change, but must follow change, allow it to arise, grow with the evolution. In doing so, one can also make a unique set of determinations in changing situations that will, in turn, influence the change everyone else is also going through. This idea is not so dissimilar from Gandhi's notion of being the change one wants to see in the world. At the same time, the Earthseed verse is also a central paradox of Earthseed, and it is the inverse of being contented, fragile, submissive, and reticent. As an alternative, it bases on the act of strong-will, acting, traveling through the journey of change, and guiding transformation to better suit the reality one wishes to create. For Lauren, this meant pursuing a better, more peaceful life. In Lauren's preparedness for change, readers also learn to be prepared, but it could be any number of means of engagement with the present for some today. Some of these actions for change include voting for elected officials, fighting to transition gracefully with climate change, making conscientious consumer selections, replanting trees and plants, and opposing/protesting apathy and inaction from administrations and conglomerates peacefully.

Like traditional religions, Earthseed has a God, a change, and a holy book called the Book of Living. The book first started as a series of truths Lauren discovers to be denied by those who latch onto an idea of a peaceful past. Later, Lauren recognizes its potential to become a religion that unifies communities and fosters life. All things mentioned previously considered, a return to the tenets of Earthseed, Lauren's religion, culminates in reflecting some Buddhist tenets' adaptation. There are two main takeaways from Lauren's theology. These are a few central tenets of Earthseed:

I am Earthseed. Anyone can be. Someday, I think there will be a lot of us. And I think we'll have to seed ourselves farther and farther from this dying place. I've never felt that I was making any of this up—not the name, Earthseed, not any of it. I mean, I've never felt that it was anything other than real: discovery rather than invention, exploration rather than creation. I wish I could believe it was all supernatural, and that I'm getting messages from God. But then, I don't believe in that kind of God. All I do is observe and take notes, trying to put things down in ways that are as powerful, as simple, and as direct as I feel them... (Butler 78)

Lauren offers the notion that Earthseed is a theology of embodiment and interconnectivity. The "dying place" of Earth, with its bioenvironmental decay and social dealings among humans constantly rotting through violence, forces the body into self-activation. Self-actualization is not a message "from God" but the recognition of theory and practice of mindfulness as a form of compassion. Unfortunately, this form of compassion for Lauren is a two-edged sword, as so is any human's pursuit of making themselves and the world

a better place—it is not always comfortable. Acceptance of this “observation” and “discovery rather than invention” leads to Earthseed theology’s development. Lauren often questions Christian concepts of justice, faith, and morality. She wonders, “Is there a God? If there is, does he (she? it?) care about us? Deists like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson believed God was something that made us, then left us on our own” (Butler 15). This quote implies that the universal epithet people have contrived overtime to justify human dealings beyond theorization leave some with no correct answers. The intangibility of an omnipotent presence that “Deists like Benjamin Franklin” used to create laws and policies still operating today hinge on the belief that people were made by God and left to reconcile their existence alone.⁶ Earthseed challenges this philosophical idea that rejects revelation as a foundation of spiritual understanding. Earthseed also challenges the assertion of deist understanding that reason and observation of the natural world are adequate to determine the presence of a creator of the universe. In chapter seven, Lauren explains the reasoning behind the name Earthseed:

SOMETIMES NAMING A THING—giving it a name or discovering its name—helps one to begin to understand it. Knowing the name of a thing and knowing what that thing is gives me even more of a handle on it. The particular God-is-Change belief system that seems right to me will be called Earthseed. I’ve tried to name it before. Failing that, I’ve tried to leave it unnamed. Neither effort has made me comfortable. Name plus purpose equals focus for me. Well, today, I found the name, found it while I was weeding the back garden and thinking about the way plants seed themselves, windborne, animalborne, waterborne, far from their parent plants. (Butler 77)

Upon discovering the “God-is-Change” belief system, Lauren recognizes that a change must occur in her pattern of thinking articulated in a way that deviates from previously conditioned ideas of what God is or was to people like Franklin, Jefferson, or her father. The “seed” in the name “Earthseed” represents cognitive downpour as an explicit retort to the undertakings toward a balanced explanation of cause and momentariness. To be more clear, a seed in this circumstance of the name of the belief system represents two sets of phenomena: (a) latent tendencies underlying the karmic cycle; and (b) the power of specific causal bonds to induce a reaction. The notion of seeds is used here only in a traditional sense and thus does not establish a real presence, whether correlated with or dissociated from thought. In this manner, the theory of seeds in the theology of Earthseed, considering the mental stream and hyperempathy of Lauren, gives an approach of discoursing about connectedness that does not eliminate unconsciousness and restoration beliefs. By comparing the organic imagery linked with seeds and blooming to reason and cognitive phenomena, the Earthseed system opens the door for awareness of mentation as an active and flexible method. It is not only a planting of ideas from “parent” plants and involves more naturally occurring phenomena, like “windborne” and “waterborne” seeding. A causal description of the cognitive activity is therefore enhanced by a dispositional statement of cognitive states that are not always true-life factors. Also, given the association of purposeful cognitive states with consciousness, cognitive events are heeded as the central force sustaining and immortalizing the hyperempathy syndrome. Lauren and the other sharers’ bodies with their sense organs and numerous additional conditioning aspects are expropriated in consciousness, guaranteeing that mentation, whether in a conscious, subliminal, or indirect cognitive form is constant. In understanding these aspects of the story first, the reader can situate the universality of Earthseed and break down its components related to Lauren’s hyperempathy. Above all,

the tale is about Lauren's compassion for humanity expressed in her religion, Earthseed, and in her powers of hyperempathy. The fact of her blackness and her sublime existence is secondary to this superpower's development, but it is essential in understanding her characterization and journey.

As mentioned earlier in this essay, *the Parable of the Sower* is prophetic in a few ways. An excellent example of this idea is how Butler involves concepts about widespread cohort capitalism with massive technology corporations who bring slavery back into tangible existence through indentured servitude. In Butler's environment, a Presidential candidate named Christopher Donner is appointed based on his pledges to disassemble parliament programs and bring jobs back to the people. He plans to (and I paraphrase from the narrative) make America great again. One must point out the apparent prophetic nature of this Afrofuturistic tale considering the dually divisive and uniting election mantra of the U.S. president in 2020—Make America Great Again. The protagonists' father, a Christian minister and academic refers to the presidential candidate as:

[A] symbol of the past for us to hold on to as we're pushed into the future. He's nothing. No substance. But having him there, the latest in a two-and-a-half-century-long line of American Presidents make people feel that the country, the culture that they grew up with is still here—that we'll get through these bad times and back to normal. (Butler 55)

There is also an upsurge in apparent and overt racism, hate transgressions, and nationalism. There are vast refugee crises of people pushed from Central America and Mexico to the United States. Also, people from the United States are forced towards Canada and to Alaska. With so much calamity present in this novel, one cannot help but see the novel's realism that appeared in society today. Many news outlets of 2020 will show the ways racism, xenophobia, hate, and capitalism are fueling people into protests of human injustice, sentient being degradation, police brutality, algorithmic racism, systemic racism, housing market racism, and other technological, psychological, and physiological forms of discrimination. Shamefully, migrants from other countries entering the U.S. are separated from their children at the border and forced to live in military sanctioned bases on cold floors wrapped in silver, flame retard blankets.

Given these points, through Lauren's hyperempathy, Butler shows how compassion prevents feelings of love, respect, and generous joy from existing while dismissing that there still exist some unpleasant states of suffering on the earth. Lauren's hyperempathy reminds readers that their satisfaction may coexist with measureless suffering. "Every one knows that change is inevitable. From the second law of thermodynamics to Darwinian evolution, from Buddhism's insistence that nothing is permanent and all suffering results from our delusions of permanence to the third chapter of Ecclesiastes ("To everything there is a season") change is part of life, of existence, of the common wisdom. But I don't believe we're dealing with all that that means. We haven't even begun to deal with it" (Butler 25). It symbolizes love and charitable happiness in understanding the suffering in the world impartial to mitigation. After the consequence of this relief has disappeared, fret and injure may still arise until suffering is uprooted completely at the recognition of unanimity. The "sharers" hyperempathy also accomplishes to show that feelings of devotion and thoughtful exhilaration close themselves up against the more abundant earth by restricting themselves to a limited area of existence without connection to other people. This hyperempathy prevents respect and great contentment from swiveling into states of self-satisfied complacency within carefully guarded prosperity.

Through Butler's work and other writers explored throughout this piece, the literature exposes the terrorism of white supremacy and the work that must be done for the non-Black/of color body to recognize and awaken to the implicit and explicit social contract it also signs globally. What also becomes apparent throughout this work is that literature brings the reader's attention to the apparent sublimation of the body of color and the African American body as not only casualties but also unfortunate participants in its perpetuation of destruction. Contemporary African American literature includes strains of black postmodernism, neoslavery, and Afrofuturism, as writers continue to develop innovative forms to complicate existing notions of race and representation through debates over politics and aesthetics, diaspora and transnationalism, and gender and sexuality.

The conversations in the literature surrounding healing of African Americans is objectivity that cannot remain stagnant in the discussion of only what captivity was, but how to better understand the lasting impact of its consequences so that appropriate means of engagement, recognition, and assessment may become incorporated into the teaching and consumption of works of literature that deal with the topic. One can name so many. However, Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and *Parable of the Sower* are particularly notable in advancing the discussion of how to write the Black body into a history, present, and future that excludes, misappropriates, or abuses its presence. These ideas deserve more discussion and deconstruction of the concept of re-writing history and writing truth to power presently.

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Notes

- ¹ Edmund Burke offered an inverted notion of sublime as it relates to black bodies. Albeit different methods, of course, there remains a distinct concern for the ways sublime forces operate to build or destroy people. As a comparative approach, I examined this project under the notion of sublime Black bodies Burke devised as a secondary concept in *Enquiry* as he explained what the sublime affected. Burke describes how the sublime forces the mind to move away from itself due to impressions' disorientation. In these moments of movement, the mind may move towards panic or terror aroused by fear, the "ruling principle of the sublime" (*Enquiry*, 58). Sublime things may be viewed as terrible because they are incomprehensible, "dark, uncertain, confused, terrible" (*Enquiry*, 59); They are not the creations of clear visions. For Burke, what stirs terror in these conditions is the understanding of a loss of domination: the mind is startled by the vision's energy and power and can neither plainly understand nor replicate it. Simultaneously, the sublime persuades one since its affection to ambiguity is beyond interpretation.
- ² Contrarily, in his essay "The Fact of Blackness," Fanon expresses the "difficulties in the development of [a] bodily schema," which "the man of color" encounters in "the white world." Fanon gives voice to the dialectical advancement of casts of race and gender, which loiter on the other side of the sublime "effects of blackness" described by Burke. Fanon counteracts the following section to broaden Burke's aesthetic assessments of darkness to blackness on part IV, section XVII, "The effects of BLACKNESS."

- ³ See Rhys Davids, T.W. & William Stede (eds.) (1921-5). *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*. Chipstead: Pali Text Society and Gethin, Rupert, *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- ⁴ See "Chapter 74: The Sower" of Paul Carus's *The Gospel of Buddha*, Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1894
- ⁵ I am grateful to Eyvonne (Yun Wang), Beijing Normal University, whom I met during a seminar with Stephano Evangelista (Oxford University) about citizens of nowhere and post-colonialism during the 10th Harvard International World Literature Institute, for discussing the Bali and Theravāda tradition of this parable with me. The spelling of *karuna* and *appamaññā* are not in the same transliteration style. It seems that *Karuṇa* is in both Sanskrit and Pali, while *apramāṇa* in Sanskrit and *appamaññā* in Pāli. *Karuṇa* is more aligned for *appamaññā*, the Bali original spelling.
- ⁶ To Burke, the sublime was an ethereal experience reached through the vision of a sight of awe and inspiration that caused bewilderment and recognition at an inability to replicate the thing or the feelings it invoked. The "darkness" and "blackness" could not invoke negative feelings without attached notions of negativity because the boy in his example was blind for most of his life, and therefore would have said the sight was the cause because Black bodies are inherently negative beings. This idea is indeed prejudiced and subverts the notion of the sublime in such a way that Fanon's "Fact of Blackness" rebuttals this xenophobic ideology to offer instead that the non-Black mind is inundated with negative images through mind and sight before the Black body has the opportunity to exist without these preconceived notions of identity assigned to it. Through other means of engagement—mind, hearing others speak, language, and social habits—the blind spot of Burke's effects of "BLACKNESS" is revealed.

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From a Context-bound to an Essentializing Conception: A Study of Longinus's Treatise *On the Sublime*

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Abstract

The treatise titled *Peri Hypsous* by Cassius Longinus and its various translations as *On the Sublime* is well-known for the rhetorical analysis on what is at the centre of 'greatness' in a writing. By highlighting the dual-transcendence structure and the notion of unrepresentable, this paper deals with the immense possibilities of the concept of the sublime to mark a journey beyond aesthetics. Critical interpretations of the terms associated with sublimity have provided ample scopes for the readers to identify the trajectory of a shift from the context-bound ideas to the essentializing conception of the sublime towards developing a cultural and political understanding of the concept in the spheres of human existence.

Keywords: Sublime, aesthetics, cultural, *megalophrosyn*

The existence of a definite discourse named the theory of the sublime, although not as a concrete theoretical framework but as a notion, can be traced back to the history of the use of some words associated with the sublime: "height" or "elevation", grandeur, terror, wonder, astonishment, awe, admiration and so on. Unlike science which explains, categorizes and defines, the sublime focuses on transcendence. The identification of an event leads itself to the discourse of experience which only after transcending some fixed barriers or boundaries, can introduce the discourse of sublimity. Robert Doran, in his book *The Theory of Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (2015) exposes the connection between the notion of transcendence and the power of mind which experiences it and he views that this connection plays a constitutive role in identifying the discourses related to the development of modern subjectivity. He puts that Sublime "is the tension between a literary-aesthetic concept and an experience with mystical religious resonances that motivates the critical concept of sublimity, creating multilayered nexuses between religion, art, nature and society" (Doran 1). Cassius Longinus's fundamental text *Peri Hypsous* is a marker of the beginning of the discourse of the sublime. The interpretation of the text has been based on rhetorical analysis in search of the key-elements of greatness in the texts of the great classical authors. But apart from rhetorical analyses, Longinus also introduces the existence of subjective elements and affect/effect dialectics into the concept of the sublime. His treatise had triggered many 18th century thinkers to think about the sublime, which despite being opposite to beautiful, is considered aesthetic. If we probe into the linguistic analyses of Longinus's treatise, especially by focusing on the words describing the effect of sublimity for example, wonder, admiration, awe, astonishment and so on, we will experience these words echoed by theories covering a wide range of

studies from empirical psychology (Edmund Burke), Literary Criticism (Nicholas Boileau, John Dennis), transcendental philosophy (Immanuel Kant) or some postmodern theories of the sublime namely Frederick Jameson, Jean Francois Lyotard and Slavoj Zizek.

This article articulates the sublime as a notion which covers a journey from a context-bound concept to an essentializing conception as exposed in the treatise of Cassius Longinus. The operative forces through which this concept functions in the spheres of human existences are indeterminacy, transcendence and the unrepresentable. Thus, the experience of the sublime becomes a cultural phenomenon. The objective of this writing is also to show the anthropological dimensions associated with the concept of transcendence. This emphasis on the notion of transcendence and unrepresentable opens endless possibilities for the concept of sublime to marks a shift from some context-bound identities to essentializing conceptions that places the concept of sublime as a common sense to read the aesthetic, cultural, religious and political levels of existences. Thus, the experience of the sublime induces a common concern for applying the concepts of transcendence and the unrepresentable in the context of the secularization of modern culture. This possibility of transcending the set barriers in the experience of the sublime is evident in the treatises of Longinus and Burke.

The significance of the contradictory notions, on one hand *thaumasion* and *ekplexis* and *ekstasis* on the other has been explained by Doran in his text:

The sublime exerts an "invincible power and force (1.4), tears everything up like a whirlwind, and exhibits the orator's whole power (*dynamis*) at a single blow (1.4), and holds complete domination over our minds (39.3); but also it is our nature to be elevated and exalted by true sublimity [*hypsos*] (7.2). This dual structure of sublimity is also paradoxical: on the one hand, being over-whelmed/ dominated by the encounter with the transcendent in art or nature induces a feeling of inferiority or submission; on the other, it is precisely by being overpowered that a high-minded feeling of superiority or nobility of soul (mental expansiveness, heroic sensibility) is attained. The tension between these two poles of a single experience – of being at once below and above, inferior and superior, humbled and exalted – produces the special dynamism of the sublime, creating nexuses with diverse areas of human reality (the religious, the political, the social, the anthropological). (*The Theory of Sublime* 10-11)

Nicholas Boileau in his work on Longinus' sublime *Traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours* (1674) shows the differences between Longinus's sublimity as focusing on rhetoric in the Aristotelian sense and the theory of sublime developed in modern culture. Boileau shows a deeper anthropological meaning of the rhetoric, not from an ethnographical perspective but from a philosophical perspective. Unlike other Greek critics, Longinus deals with the affect, the nature of the imagination (*phantasia*), and the moral and spiritual development of the individual as the core aspects of rhetorical analysis. Many critics throughout the centuries have shown the inherent transhistorical essence in the concept of sublimity under his apparent illustration of sublimity in terms of a specific rhetorical technique of discourse.

Glorifying Bourgeois Hero: *Megalophrosyn*: A Marker of Movement?

The dual transcendence-structure of sublime is to a large extent, determines the attitude toward the great social revolution of modernity. The historical discourse of sublimity witnesses a significant shifting point from the decline of the feudal nobility to the emergence of a middle class. This shift denotes a shift from a culture promoting

aristocratic-warrior ethos to another reflecting bourgeois-mercantile values. The intricate connection with affect and the possibilities for a secularized existence enable the experience of the sublime to speak about an evolving democratizing society. Doran views, "In effect what thinkers such as Boileau, Burke and Kant achieve through the sublime is a bourgeois appropriation of aristocratic subjectivity (the heroic cast of mind)." (*The Theory of Sublime* 20)

Aristotle mentions the concept of "*megalopsuchos*", the man of great soul as a key element in the Book IV, section 3 of *Nicomachean Ethics*. Longinus used "*megethos*" (grandeur) as synonymous with *hypsous*. *Megalo* encompasses both the talent or ability of the writer and his or her moral superiority (nobility of mind). Curtius in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* views: "the Greeks did not know the concept of the creative imagination. They had no word for it. What the poet produced was a fabrication. Aristotle praises Homer for having taught poets 'to lie properly'. For him, as we know, poetry was mimesis... But is Aristotle really the last word of antique literary criticism? Fortunately, we have the treatise *On the Sublime*." (398)

The concept of *megalophrosyn* thus marks a movement, a shift from the context-based concept of a hero to the essentializing concept of a hero. In "The Morality of the Sublime: To John Dennis", Jeffrey Barnouw shows that through the notion of *megalophrosyn*, Longinus did not indicate anything other-worldly; rather, the ideas associated with 'greatness in mind' are interrelated with political oratory and "touches the concerns of reputation and interest in civic life" ("The Morality of the Sublime: To John Dennis" 32). Longinus' treatise unfolds a tension between the mystical-religious and the secular poetic.

Doran exposes the explicit relationship between the social change/revolution occurred from the Fronde of 1650 – 1653 (French civil war paving the way for concomitant destruction of the feudal order) to the French Revolution (1789-99) which consolidated the power of the bourgeois as the dominant social class; and, the peak period holding interest in the theory of sublimity from Boileau's translation of 1674 to Kant's third critique published in 1790 (Doran 20). Boileau extols the heroic nature of Cassius Longinus, the 3rd century philosopher and critic. He associates the qualities of the 17th century figure of the *honnete homme* (a man possessing high sensibility, refinement, and probity) with the mental elevation of Longinus. It might sound appropriate if we correlate this term with an evolving social category (by and large associated with the middle class, though not necessarily) with a progressing mental disposition.

***Ekstasis* (ecstasy), *Ekplexis* (astonishment, amazement) and *Thaumasion* (wonder, awe): Sublime in Experiencing the Shift from Aesthetic to Cultural**

The history associated with the word *thaumazein* bears much significance in this context. Since Aristotle, this word bears a sense closer to the verb "to wonder". Aristotle had used this verb "to wonder" (*thaumazien*) in *Metaphysics*, to describe the starting point of philosophy: "For from wonder (*thaumazein*) men, both now and at the first, began to philosophize, having felt astonishment (*thaumazein*) at things which were more obvious, indeed, amongst those that were doubtful" (982b). Socrates' dictum in Plato's *Theaetetus* also echoes the same: "This is an experience which is characteristic of a philosopher, this wondering (*thaumazein*): this is where philosophy begins and nowhere else" (155d). Later Edmund Burke cited this idea as "confused images" (images that excite by their lack of clarity) in his *Enquiry* to describe Milton's portrayal of Satan in *Paradise Lost* as being productive of the sublime (E 62).

The notion of *ekstasis* is interrelated with the effect of *hypsous* which is deeply rooted in the history of Greek culture. M.A Screech in *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly*, discusses the etymological nature of the term:

In classical Greek *ekstasis* means a displacement or a casting down of a thing from its normal place or state. From this literal meaning it took on the sense of a form of acute distraction, brought on by a strong emotion such as terror or astonishment. Under the influence of such an ecstasy a man or woman might be vouchsafed visions from God or the gods. The verb *existemi* – to put something out of its place – similarly acquired the meaning of “to astonish” or “to amaze”. (48-49)

Nicholas Boileau emphasizes on two verbs, *ravir* (ravish, enrapture) and *transporter* (carry away with emotion) (TS 74) which symbolizes that the concept of sublime, by the dint of its intensity indicates an extraordinary state of mind and is displaced from everyday state. Screech in his work refers to Philo's interpretation of Old Testament in which the latter used the term *ekstasis* in a different way (*Ecstasy* 48-49).

Ekplexis (astonishment, amazement) is also used to describe the aesthetic effect of *anagnorisis* (recognition) by portraying the experience of recognition as thrilling. In Longinus, *Ekplexis* is associated with the concept of *Kairos*. *Kairos* indicates the concept of “well-timed flash” or “suddenly” which is experienced in a subjective realization and is intricately associated with the concept of *Ekplexis*.

Concept of Aesthetic Temporality: *Kairos*

Doran unfolds the contradiction embedded within the concept of “*kairos*”: *Kairos* as non-relational and *Kairos* as relative. This debate presents the concept of the sublime to be transhistorical (*The Theory of Sublime* 47-48). Besides, the concepts of “*energeia*” and “*phantasia*” present *hypsos* as a transgeneric concept. Nietzsche's aesthetic thoughts reflect on the influence of Longinus on modernism. German critic Karl Heinz Bohrer in “Suddenness: on the Moment of Aesthetic Appearance” exposes the connection between Longinian Sublimity and modernist aesthetics. In order to explain the German terms *Augenblick* (the moment) and *Plotzlichkeit* (suddenness) in his text Bohrer argues: “The specific elements that we found in Nietzsche's aesthetic epiphany are already contained in Longinus's discussion of the metaphorical repertory of sublime discourse...[Longinus's metaphor of ‘lightning’ and the ‘all-at-once’, the momentum, that characterize the emphatic language of Nietzsche is repeated often in longinus]” (“Suddenness” 129).

True and False Sublimity: Sublime as a Methodology to Essentialize the Truth in Aesthetics and Culture

According to Longinus, the pre-requisite for true sublimity is intersubjective agreement or universality. Longinus views a false sublimity as turgidity (bombast), puerility (the overelaboration of an inferior idea), frigidity (expressions unworthy of the thought; and *parenthyrsos* (excessive, artificial or untimely *akairos* emotion). Doran argues, “Surefire proof of literary value lies in the universal and transhistorical appeal of a text, in its ability to connect readers who are temporally and culturally dispersed (people of different trainings, ways of life, tastes and ages”) (Doran 54)

Stephen Halliwell in *Between Ecstasy and Truth* views the sublime “moment of truth” in Longinus as a noncognitive awareness of the mind's true vocation stretches the concept of truth beyond the Platonic conception, perhaps toward a protoexistentialist one

(authenticity) (332). Doran indicates how Longinus conceives sublimity “in terms of an intersubjective structure of experience (author-reader), which is distinct from intra-subjective agreement (reader-reader)” (*The Theory of Sublime* 55). He points out at the moral dimension of Longinus’s distinction between true and false sublimity. He argues that Longinus, by associating sublimity with high-mindedness, indicates at the presumption that the false sublime is a kind of moral corruption, in the sense of *corruption optima pessima*. Doran here finds a similarity between Longinus’ sublimity and Plato’s concept of truth beyond all appearances. (*The Theory of Sublime* 55-57)

Sublimity in Essentializing Affect as a Core Aspect of Human Existence

The intrinsic connection between the idea of the nobility of mind and the experience of sublimity as an emotional response exposes the nexus between affect and sublimity. The nexus between emotion (pathos) and sublimity is felt when we see it intrinsically connected to the idea of nobility of mind, on one side and on the other, to the experience of sublimity as an emotional response. Doran presents how Longinus conceives antagonistic or oppositional relation between nature and rhetorical artifice, which also reinforces the primacy of the natural sources in *Peri hypsous*.

We can observe a two-fold project of Longinus’s elaboration:

- To show how each contributes to the production of *hypsous*
- To show how each contributes to the effect of *hypsous*

These two aims – pedagogical (creatively oriented) and analytic (receptively oriented) – sometimes become fused. *Noesis* originated from the noun *nous* (mind/intellect) and the verb *noein* (to think) connotes the intellectual part of the mind (*noetikos* means “intellectual”) and survives as an adjective “*noetic*” in modern English. Longinus refers to Plato’s idea of “*noesis*” denoting the direct apprehension of transcendent entities associated with wisdom in contrast to *dianoia* which is scientific, mathematical or logical knowledge. Longinus conceives “thought” in the sublime as *noesis*, a notion suggesting transcendence and creativity as opposed to the more pedestrian *dianoia*, which in Demetrius’s *On Style*, refers to the subject matter of a discourse. Longinus explains grandeur of conception into three aspects: *megalophrosyne*, *zelosis-mimesis* and *phantasia*. Although Longinus adds one short section on “amplification” to these aspects, he considers it an intensifying rather than an essential factor.

Robert Doran, in his book, pointed at the three aspects of Longinus’s treatment. He shows *Megalophrosyne* indicating nobility of spirit in the light of its social, moral and Universalist implications. *Zelosis-mimesis* is the emulation of transcendental models which Doran examines in terms of an agonistic relation with tradition and *Phantasia* is imagination or visualization. Doran explained this as “the verbal poetic analog of the idea of transcendence in nature” which is mind’s creative capacity to transcend the sensible world. (*The Theory of Sublime* 58-81)

Here, one may refer to the autonomy of “*noesis*” which is emblematically expressed in the following passage on the “Silence of Ajax”: “Thus even without being spoken, a simple idea will of its own accord excite admiration by reason of the greatness of mind that it expresses; for example, the silence of Ajax in ‘The Summoning of the Spirits’ is grand, more sublime than any speech!” (9.2).

Doran clarifies that although it is evident that the silence of Ajax could not have been indicated without discourse, Longinus, through this, wanted to establish that sublimity

is principally a manifestation of the mental qualities of the writer, not a property of language per se. M. H. Abrams, in his *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953), contends that Longinus can be considered the first theorist who inspires the Romantic concept of the self-expressive ego and the concomitant exaltation of the artist. I mention a passage from Longinus's text here:

The first source, natural greatness [*megalophues*], is the most important. Even it is a matter of endowment rather than acquisition, we must, so far as is possible, develop our minds in the direction of greatness and make them always pregnant with noble thoughts. You ask how this can be done. I wrote elsewhere something like this. "Sublimity [*hypsos*] is the echo of a noble mind [*megalophrosyne*]" ...First then we must state here where sublimity [*hypsos*] comes from: the orator must not have low or ignoble thoughts. Those whose thoughts and habits are small and servile all their lives cannot possibly produce anything admirable or worthy of eternity. Words [*logoi*] will be great if thoughts are weighty. (9.1-3)

This passage brings to the mind the "expressive" or "author-centered" theory of art where it clarifies that *hypsos* is not simply a matter of a momentary state of mind, a mental event, but of a pattern of thinking. One's expressive capacity is conditioned by having certain kinds of thoughts or a particular nature. Longinus thus establishes a direct causal link between the particular moral/mental disposition of the genius and his/her products.

Sublime-in-Nostalgia vs. Reformatory Sublimity

A sociological dimension of the conception of *hypsos* as nobility of mind (*megalophrosyne*) seems to be indicative of a specific class ethos. Although Longinus uses a person with high social status as an example of high-mindedness, people whom he called "heroes" are the poets, the philosophers, the orators, the historians whose social backgrounds are incidental to their nobility of spirit. He focuses on a hierarchy of mentalities and not on any class-based hierarchy.

The idea of *zelosis-mimesis*, literally "zealous imitation" was a commonplace of the circle of rhetorical theorists around Caecilius of Calacte, Longinus's interlocutor. Dionysius, in his *On Imitation*, describes *mimesis* as an action receiving an imprint of a model through examination of it and *Zelosis* as an act of the soul moved toward admiration of what seems fine. This coupling of *mimesis* with the *zelosis* gets an anthropological dimension in Longinus's theory, especially through some narrators who render this coupling with the single term "emulation". The veneration for past models seems to devalorize the creative potential of the present, subordinating it to an assumed superiority of the past. But there is an underlying paradox in the dialectical import of *zelosis-mimesis* in Longinus's creation aesthetics. On the one hand there is respect for tradition, on the other hand it reflects an urge for the subversion of tradition. This paradoxical pattern produces a constant threat of deviation from the extant cultural and aesthetic norms.

Imagination dissociated from memory — Non-relational or Relative?

Phantasia, in Longinus's rhetoric, reflects the orator's ability to influence an addressee through the conjuring of images. It presents what mind cannot perceive in actuality. Longinus clearly distinguishes between the philosophical conception of *phantasia* and the linguistic use of this notion in order to denote a possibility of a new discourse of imagination. In *Sophist*, Plato conceives *phantasia* as a combination of perception (*aisthesis*) and belief (*doxa*). Aristotle, on the other hand, defines it as an aptitude that negotiates

between *aesthesis* (sensation) and *nous* (intellect/thinking). The idea of “productive imagination” hints at the modern notion of imagination that is associated with the ideas of originality, creativity, and genius. In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of view* Kant distinguishes the “reproductive imagination” and the “productive imagination”. Kant defines “reproductive imagination” as a force which functions as a relation to the world and the “productive imagination” as something which operates “in an original way (not imitatively)” (*APP* 7:246). According to Kant, the concept of *phantasy* must not be mixed with memory, because “memory would be unfaithful” (*APP* 7:182). It is, in fact, connected with creativity: “Fantasy, that is, the creative power of imagination” (*APP* 7:182). Doran views: “Indeed for Longinus, images of the greatest extent and power are to be found not in the external world but in the visionary capacity of the mind; *phantasia* is thus an essential part of *hypsous* precisely because it transcends sensibility.” (*The Theory of Sublime* 25)

Communicability of *Hypsous* as an Essentializing Conception in Aesthetics and Culture

This discussion focuses on the significance of both the creative (theory of genius) and receptive (affect, influence) standpoints in Longinus’s theory which set the notions associated with sublimity free of all context-bound restrictions of aesthetic discussion. This analysis further indicates at the intersubjective dimension, the communicability of *hypsous* as mental disposition of high-mindedness. Stephen Halliwell in *Between Ecstasy and Truth: Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus* points out at Longinus’s vast critical intelligence by mentioning that “the only major document in the history of Western literary criticism and theory whose frame of reference extends all the way from sensitivity to the individual words, even individual syllables, of text to a sense of the infinite spaces that lie (in thought) ‘outside the cosmos’” (327). Chapter 35 and chapter 44 in *Pery Hypsous* deal with the idea of infinity and the cultural significance of the concept of sublime in detail. Longinus’s discussion of the grandeur of nature is understood through the further development of his concept of sublime rivalry (*zelosis-mimesis*) which is associated with the anthropological significance of *hypsous* – of how sublimity exposes humankind’s natural vocation for transcendence which Robert Doran identifies as “the constant striving beyond the limits of the sensible world or toward the divine” (*The Theory of Sublime* 82). Longinus’s critique of cultural decline is strongly rooted in his earlier discussion of high-mindedness (*megalophrosyne*).

The true sources of greatness/sublimity depend on the disposition of the writer i.e the subjective conditions of transcendence. Longinus argues that “other literary qualities prove their users to be human; sublimity raises us towards the spiritual greatness of God” (36.1) Malcolm Heath adds here “assimilation to the divine was identified as the goal of human life by a strong philosophical tradition” (*Ancient Philosophical Poetics* 179). But Doran identifies the unique aesthetic valence that Longinus added to the idea of sublimity. The following passage from Longinus can be mentioned to show the anthropological origins of sublimity:

What then was the vision which inspired those divine writers who disdained exactness of detail and aimed at the greatest prizes in literature? Above all else it was the understanding that nature made man to be no humble or lowly creature but brought him into life and into the universe as into a great festival, to be both a spectator and an enthusiastic contestant in its competitions. She implanted in our minds from the start an irresistible desire for anything which is great and, in relation to ourselves, supernatural/divine. The universe therefore is

not wide enough for the range of human speculation and intellect [*theoria*]. Our thoughts often travel beyond the boundaries of our surroundings. If anyone wants to know what we were born for, let him look round at life and contemplate the splendor, grandeur and beauty in which it everywhere abounds. It is a natural inclination that leads us to admire not the little streams, however pellucid and however useful, but the Nile, the Danube, the Rhine, and above all the ocean. Nor do we feel so much awe before the little flame we kindle, because it keeps its light clear and pure, as before the fires of heaven, though they are often obscured. We do not think our flame more worthy of admiration than the craters of Etna, whose eruptions bring up rocks and whole hills out of depths, and sometimes pour forth rivers of earth-born spontaneous fire. A single comment fits all these examples: the useful are readily available to man, it is the unusual that excites our wonder. (35.2-5)

Longinus claims that an attraction to natural grandeur reveals an innate desire for transcendence and this desire induces the possibility of sublimity in verbal arts. Apart from the critic's attempt to focus on external nature, chapter 35 speaks about a limitless expansion of the mind even without mentioning the term "infinity". Grandeur of conception (*noesis*), thus, claims that the range of human speculation and intellect is wider than the universe. Malcolm Heath views that "assimilation to the divine was identified as the goal of human life by a strong philosophical tradition" (*Ancient Philosophical Poetics* 179).

The concept of *zelosis-mimesis* (emulation) stresses on the language of competition: "Nature made man to be no humble or lowly creature but brought him into life and into the universe as into a great festival, to be both a spectator and an enthusiastic contestant in his competitions" (*Ancient Philosophical Poetics* 179). These two ideas of being both "spectator" and "contestant" in the context of the theory of the sublime is very significant. This point was perhaps taken into consideration by Immanuel Kant when he speaks about the superiority of the human mind over natural determination.

It is Thomas Burnet, the British theologian and cosmogonist, who in *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681/1684), identifies the dual overwhelming-exulting structure of sublimity as complex pleasure (pleasure mixed with pain) which paves ways for many new theories in modernity. He also identifies the idea of being challenged to strive beyond limits: "too big for our comprehension". Burnet's interpretation of mitigating a negative emotion, such as fear, is considered to be a source of inspiration for John Dennis's concept of "delightful horror". Burnet by referring Genesis focuses on Longinus's explanation in chapter 35:

The greatest objects of Nature are, methinks, the most pleasing to behold; and next to the great concave of the Heavens, and those boundless Regions where the Stars inhabit, there is nothing that I look upon with more pleasure than the wide Sea and the mountains of the Earth. There is something august and stately in the air of these things, that inspires the mind with great thoughts and passions. We do naturally, upon such occasions, think of God and his greatness: and whatsoever hath but the shadow and appearances of INFINITE, as all things have that are too big for our comprehension, they fill and overbear the mind with their Excess, and cast it into a pleasing kind of stupor and admiration. (*The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681/1684) 158)

Burnet implies that the secular aspect of the concept of sublimity rests on its nature associated with the notion of unrepresentable. Burnet speaks about an aesthetic and secular dimension to the concept of divine in terms of all that is too big for our comprehension. Charles Taylor also in *A secular Age* (2007), mentions Burnett as an instance

of a shift away from how “contemporary apologetics” conceived of a “human-centered way of discovering God’s presence in nature,” namely as “comprehensible, orderly, and human-friendly” to what Burnet shows how nature “discloses Him in another way” (334), namely in overwhelming nature. Longinus’s stress on *megalophrosyne* and his explanation of mental expansiveness in terms of boundlessness in chapter 35 establishes the anthropological basis of sublimity. Marjorie Hope Nicolson in *Mountain Gloom, Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*, shows how, the revival of Longinus in Burnet is significant in retrieving the secular and artistic dimensions of natural grandeur (especially mountains) which, prior to that was considered ugly and utterly irreligious. This aesthetic reflection on natural grandeur bears two-fold purposes; on one hand, it valorizes and divinizes certain objects of nature and on the other, it secularizes a type of religious experience. Thus, the notion of sublime induces an experience which through the motifs of indeterminacy, transcendence and the unrepresentable marks several kinds of movements in the process of forming the conception. It widens the idea of rationality by going beyond the fixed understanding of certain categories. These movements shift the concept of sublime from a context-bound idea to an essentializing conception in understanding the nature of aesthetics, cultural and political spheres of human existence.

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Feeling Thoughts: The Swarming Sublime in Longinus's *On Sublimity*

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Abstract

Longinus's concept of the sublime remains elusive because he intentionally avoids offering a clear definition of it. While his text has been given the name *On Sublimity*, it is uncertain exactly what this *on* refers to. This article argues that Longinus's aversion to plainly defining his subject ought to be read as rejecting the requirements for good composition articulated by Plato, one of Longinus's main interlocutors. Plato's doctrine of organic unity demands that texts begin with a clear definition; to break from this demand, however, is a constitutive feature of the Longinian sublime.

Keywords: affect theory, media and communication, classical aesthetics, doctrine of organic unity, Plato

*On Sublimity*¹ begins with a dismissal: Longinus rejects Caecilius's text on the same topic because Caecilius forgoes "practical help" and instead explains "what sort of thing 'the sublime' is, as though we did not know" (1.1). *On Sublimity* does the opposite. Despite claiming that a "textbook" needs to accurately define "what its subject is," Longinus avoids "any preliminary long definition" beyond the vague description of sublimity as "a kind of eminence or excellence of discourse" (1.1, 1.3). He instead focuses primarily on the practical "art of sublimity" (2.1). I read this aversion alongside the doctrine of organic unity found in Plato's *Phaedrus*, a doctrine that requires a clear definition for the correct organization of discourse. Whereas Plato's doctrine attempts to eliminate misinterpretation by restricting text to defending a single definition, Longinus finds sublimity in language's ability to communicate not a single idea but a swarm [*synodos*]² of often paradoxical thoughts and feelings brought together in an admirable way.

1. The Swarming Sublime

Traditionally, one might attempt to "emphasise a view of sublimity" in Longinus "as an organic whole" by evaluating the internal consistency of the text (a challenge because of the frequent lacunae) and contextualizing Longinus within the tradition of classical rhetoric (also challenging, because of Longinus's unknown historical identity) (Innes, "Longinus: Structure and Unity" 302). D. A. Russell and D. C. Innes, for example, find structural consistency in *On Sublimity* by discovering the hidden "fourfold purpose" of an apology—to defend the accused, attack the accuser, praise the defendant, and provide instruction (Russell, "Longinus Reconsidered" 74). Just as Plato's *Apology* defends and praises Socrates while attacking and instructing the Athenians, so too does Longinus

defend and praise Plato as a sublime poet while attacking and instructing Plato's critics.³ Alternatively, James Porter and Stephen Halliwell develop strong contextual arguments to trace the sublime as a theme that develops from Homeric poetry until its manifestation by Longinus. They, for example, link Longinus's discourse of sublimity to the beyond human experience described in Plato's *Phaedrus* by the myth of the soul as a winged chariot ascending to "The place beyond heaven" when "nourish[ed]" by "beauty, wisdom, [and] goodness" (*Phaedrus* 246e–247c).⁴

Neil Hertz and Suzanne Guerlac also analyze *On Sublimity* and the *Phaedrus* but instead focus on the doctrine of organic unity. Dictated by Socrates, the doctrine demands "Every speech must be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own," and that "Definition" must head the speech/body, *organizing* all the "things scattered about everywhere" into limb-like oppositional pairs (*Phaedrus* 264c–266a). This doctrine ensures clear communication by preventing meaning from "wander[ing] in different directions" (*Phaedrus* 263b). While both Hertz and Guerlac agree "It is certain that Longinus takes the doctrine seriously" given how often he invokes Plato's image of "the body" as a "figure of unity," these critics neglect to consider how this compositional doctrine might relate to the structure of Longinus's text (Hertz 4; Guerlac 283). As G.M.A. Grube argues, the absence in *On Sublimity* of a "formal definition" creates "confusion" about the sublime because, without an overarching definition for reference, Longinus gets "carried away by his own enthusiasms" (xii, xi). But—as I will demonstrate—getting carried away is the art of the sublime. The sublime exceeds the restricted definition and binary either/or arrangement. It separates the head (definition) and scatters the body (argument).

Consider Longinus's purported defense of Plato. In the classical discourse on the sublime, arguments seem to proceed by defining the sublime and evaluating a writer according to that definition. By this method, a critic could refute a writer's sublimity with contrary evidence, i.e., examples of failure. But for Longinus, Plato's examples of failure are also evidence of sublimity. Error, or "erratic excellence," he claims, displays more sublimity than sterile "Impeccability" (36.4). Longinus thus replaces the oppositional either/or structure of organic unity with a logic of the both/and as error paradoxically contributes to greatness, and contrary evidence becomes more evidence in confirmation. When swarmed by sublime feelings and thoughts, opposites unite; the left limb becomes indistinguishable from the right.

As an example of sublime arrangement, Longinus offers Sappho's *fragment 31* ("phainetai moi"), noting how the poem captures the feeling of the body coming apart in the "madness of being in love" by "selecting outstanding details and making a unity of them":⁵

Do you not admire the way in which she brings everything together—mind and body, hearing and tongue, eyes and skin? She seems to have lost them all and to be looking for them as though they were external to her. She is cold and hot, mad and sane, frightened and near death, all by turns. The result is that we see in her not a single emotion, but a complex [*synodos*/swarm] of emotions. (10.1–10.3)⁶

Could the same arrangement not be said about the structure of *On Sublimity*? Longinus hurries from point to point, contrasting "individual words, even individual syllables" to the "infinite space" of thought, making him also seem both hot and cold, mad and sane, frightened and near death (Halliwell 327). His text's structure echoes the effect of Demosthenes's "flurry of anaphora and asyndeta," where "order becomes disorderly," yet "disorder ... acquires a certain order" (Innes "Longinus: Structure and Unity," 302; Longinus 20.3). He frequently describes the experience of this order/disorder by referring

to it as “enthusiasm [*enthusiastikon*],” “ecstasy [*ekstasin*],” and “Bacchic frenzy [*baccheumasi*]” (my trans.; 8.1, 1.4, 16.4). These Dionysian descriptions associate sublimity with the *sparagmos*, the frenetic tearing apart of a sacrificial body, like the cattle ripped asunder by the Maenads in the *Bacchae*. If considered as a response to the doctrine of organic unity, sublimity-as-*sparagmos* suggests a frantic tearing apart of the speech/body while releasing a swarm of meanings and feelings.

2. The Sublime is both Father and Son

Situating Longinus within the broader tradition of rhetoric in antiquity, Porter argues that the classical discourses on beauty and the sublime are both hewn from the same aesthetic conceptions: a theorist like Plato “might as well have said” that “beauty” is also “a matter of ‘sublimity’ (and one suspects he would have done so if the terminology had been available to him)” (564). Porter’s most intriguing example of the collision between these two terms comes from Plato’s *Symposium* and the contrast between the speeches of Alcibiades and Socrates, both on the theme of love and madness. Socrates’s speech recounts Diomata’s classification of reproductive desire as the desire for “immortality” (207a). She argues that we sublimate reproductive desire by climbing the “rising stairs” of thought from beautiful bodies to beautiful ideas, and finally to the form of beauty itself (211c). One becomes “pregnant [*egkumôn*]” when one “touches” true beauty, in turn giving “birth to true beauty” and becoming “immortal” through that reproduction (209a-212a). Here, Diomata notes that a beautiful thing—like a young man—has the sublime power to “strike you out of your senses” and make you behave irrationally. But compare the young man’s beauty to the pure form of beauty itself, and the already too alluringly beautiful youth seems drab (211d-212a).

When Socrates finishes, Alcibiades enters. Alcibiades warns against listening to Socrates because his words intoxicate like Silenus’s Dionysian music: “his melodies are themselves divine” (215c). Alcibiades describes what this experience is like, and, as Porter points out, this description is nearly equivalent to Sappho’s *fragment 31*: “my heart starts leaping” versus “it flutters my heart in my breast”; “the moment he starts to speak” versus hearing her “sweet voice”; “I stop my ears” versus “my ears hum”; “tears come streaming down my face” versus “cold sweat pours off me”; “my life isn’t worth living” versus “I seem near dying”; he “seemed marvelously godlike” versus “he seems to me like the gods” (Porter 599).⁷ At this moment, Plato portrays Alcibiades and Socrates as opposites. Socrates is old and ugly; Alcibiades is young and beautiful; Socrates drinks but stays sober; Alcibiades is already inebriated; Socrates displays reserve; Alcibiades, hysterics; one speaks about touching beauty through reason; the other feels irrationally touched by speech; we remember Socrates’s integrity; Alcibiades, for his treachery. While they are opposites, they remain related: sublime Socrates loves beautiful Alcibiades; beautiful Alcibiades reveres sublime Socrates—like Aristophanes mythical people, they are separate but deeply connected.

This connection draws attention to how the medium and the message are separate yet inextricably linked. Plato portrays Socrates in love with the pure presence of ideas (the message) while portraying Alcibiades in love with Socrates’s power to represent ideas in speech (the medium). For Socrates, the proper communication of ideas requires purifying the message from the medium. For example, Socrates provides in the *Phaedo* the “thickest possible description” of life if one could ascend and live in heavens with “the purely intelligible realm of Ideas” (Porter 574). In this realm, one could “communicate” directly

with “the gods ... by speech,” and if one were then to look upon the Earth, they would see “a continuum of variegated colors”—the world becomes a rainbow, the symbol of Iris, daughter of Wonder, and the messenger of the Gods (*Phaedo* 111b, 110d). When the human medium of language contaminates ideas, a different power emerges. Alcibiades recognizes that Socrates’s speeches have the same “Magnetic” or “divine power” as the singing of the rhapsode, who drives his hearers into an enthusiastic frenzy without necessarily imparting knowledge (*Ion* 533d). While the *Symposium*’s structure—a “Chinese box” of stories within stories—draws attention to the “fragility” of the “knowledge” lost in representation and communication, Alcibiades recognizes the power of communication itself, which flows through even a lesser “account” of Socrates’s speech (Nussbaum 167–8; *Symposium* 215d).

One power affects false memory; the other, knowledge. Plato attacks both poetry and writing along these lines. In the *Phaedrus*, for example, Socrates recounts the myth of Theuth’s introduction of writing, and its subsequent rejection by King Thamus for not being “a potion [*pharmakon*] for remembering, but for reminding” (*Phaedrus* 275a). True memory means knowledge of “the Beautiful” and “the Good,” which we learn “before we were born” and must remember in life (*Phaedo* 76d–e). False memory is memorization and recitation, a reminder of what was said without knowing its meaning. Writing assists the latter but not necessarily the former. In *Preface to Plato*, Eric Havelock argues that Plato exiles the poets in the *Republic* for the same reason that Thamus rejects writing: Plato perceives “communication” through poetry as a harmful “psychic poison,” “confus[ing] our intelligence,” and in need of an “antidote” (Havelock 5).⁸ Ironically, as Havelock points out, the “mode of consciousness” Plato inhabits from his experiences with writing is what separates him from the “oral state of mind” and allows him to slow down the “rhythmic memorized experience” of rhapsodic poetry, permitting analysis and criticism (41, 47). “Stop,” Socrates says as Phaedrus recites Lysias’s speech: “Read it” again, so that he can “hear it in [Lysias’s] own words” and submit them to analysis (262e–263e). Within the binary of either memory or knowledge, Homeric poetry is a kind of writing, a mere aid to memory. The various formulae and epithets in the poem assist both memorization and improvisation. Laurels are awarded for the rhapsode’s performative creativity and flourish when employing these devices to channel the energy of the space, of the crowd, or of the song. Ion, for example, wins the prize, and “it’s worth hearing how well [he’s] got Homer dressed up” rather than for what he knows (*Ion* 530d). But Plato via Socrates has no interest in “reliving experience” in the rhapsode’s performative “memory” (Havelock 45). Plato insists on “analyzing and understanding it”—tearing the experience apart to know it completely (Havelock 45).

Longinus likely writes a half century or so later.⁹ The situation has changed, as the rhapsode no longer curates culture. The collector of papyrus has replaced him. Papyrus has what Harold Innis calls a space-bias: its relatively cheap production and lightweight material enable the transmission of messages across vast distances, helping the Roman Empire bind together huge swathes of territorial space through a vast “centralized bureaucratic administration” (Innis 106). In any given media culture, “monopolies of knowledge” coalesce around the opposite bias, in this case, time (Innis 117). Papyrus rots. So libraries operated by a literary elite come together to bind time through the preservation and copying of manuscripts. In the great libraries, however, too much material amasses—writing buries writing under more writing. Rhetoric remains vital for the politically minded, but for the teachers of rhetoric—who are also guardians of

texts—why read and save Plato, who seems to condemn both writing and rhetoric? Longinus answers this question by appropriating Plato's discourse of immortality, beauty, and pregnancy.

Plato's critique of writing repeats the familial structure employed by the theory of the universe in the *Timaeus*, where the *khôra*, the space, or the motherly "receptacle of all becoming," is stamped by the forms (father) to bring representation (the son) into being (*Timaeus*, original italics 49a).¹⁰ As Jacques Derrida points out, Plato uses this structure to criticize writing for being "intimately bound to the absence of the father" (Derrida 82). Once "written down," claims Socrates, "every discourse roams about everywhere ... And when it is faulted and attacked unfairly, it always needs its father's support; alone, it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support" (*Phaedrus* 275e). Socrates proposes the doctrine of organic unity to assist orators who feel "ashamed" and "afraid" to "leave any writings behind," lest their offspring misrepresent them, and posterity accuses them as sophists—a fear that writing may kill them and their integrity like "a lost or parricidal son" (*Phaedrus* 257d; Derrida 152). Organic unity protects the father/author by policing and restricting the possibility of future meaning in a text. Longinus responds to this Oedipal model by appropriating the *Symposium's* discourse: the writer's mind is not father but mother, a medium, *khôra*, or receptacle that touches past beauty and births its future. Like the Pythia touched by the divine, and "made pregnant [*egkumona*]" by the supernatural power," sublimity makes us "pregnant [*egkumonas*] with noble thoughts"¹¹ which we externalize in writing (Longinus 13.2, 9.1). To the fear of posterity described in Plato, Longinus has this to say:

If a man is afraid of saying anything which will outlast his own life and age, the conceptions of his mind are bound to be incomplete and abortive; they will miscarry and never be brought to birth whole and perfect for the day of posthumous fame. (14.3)

Longinus thus inverts the familial structure: sublime writing is the father that impregnates the mind with sublime thoughts, which in turn gives birth to more sublime writing.

3. The Sublime is Both True and False

Consider the sources of the sublime. In Longinus's section on greatness of thought—the first and often considered most important of the five sources of sublimity—Longinus describes sublimity as "the echo of a noble mind" (9.2). The word Longinus uses here for "noble mind" *megalophrosunes*, "recall[s]," according to Robert Doran, Aristotle's moral "great-souled man" or *megalopsuchos*—formed from the root *psyche*—"who deserves and claims great things" (Doran 49; Aristotle 1123b8-30). While these words are sometimes interchangeable, the philosophical tradition sought to distinguish the *psyche* as a rational agent "independent" of the more irrational mind associated with "the poetic performance and poetised tradition," (Havelock 200). The *phren*, the root of Longinus's word, which lends its meaning to words like frenzy and frenetic, and which translates best as heart or breast, does the opposite. It blurs the distinction between feeling and thought. Hippolytus's "tongue swore" for example, "but [his] heart (or mind or other backstage artiste) [*phren*] did not"—a well-cited line which places the *phren* in excess of the discursive mind (Austin 9–10).¹² Achilles likewise plays his lyre, "singing of men's fame" while feeling/thinking or "delighting his heart [*phren*]" (Homer 9.185–90).

Sublimity is the echoing of great feelings/thoughts through time in the space [*khôra*] of one's mind. The echo opposes Plato's mirror (a different kind of *khôra*) in his critique of

mimesis. Plato uses the mirror to depict poets as mere image-makers: the poet expresses their agency by using a mirror to “make” things “appear” inside, but “not as they truly are” (*Republic* 596e). The artist mirrors a bed, but that mirror image could not and should not be confused with an actual bed. This way of characterizing poetry reflects Plato’s overall view of language previously discussed, where to read or recite the words of another would be to imitate or represent them without knowing what they really mean. Hence, repetition is ontologically suspect. But the ontology of an echo offers a different way of thinking about repetition. In an echo, it is the same sound which adds to itself in time. Echo is amplification not representation. Sublime poetry is not an imitation of the words of another but their echo, resounding in the voice/mind of the reader/speaker. This echo produces what Stephen Halliwell describes as “a powerful *intersubjectivity*” through the “transmission of heightened consciousness between different minds via the penetrating language of speech or text” — a “collective enthusiasm [*synenthusiōsi*]” (333, original italics; my trans.; Longinus 13.2). This image of the echo has inspired reflection on the text’s composition as a series of examples. The sublime-as-echo-as-example suggests sublimity may be a “documentary technique,” a “play with quotation and of quotation,” or an “ongoing force of enunciation through the act of citation” (Carson 96; Hertz 2; Guerlac 276). In this view, the greatness of feeling/thought in the citation’s passage is lent to it by that very citation — the more frequent the resounding echo, the more sublimity the passage accumulates.

While discussing “noble [*gennaía*] diction,” however, Longinus draws our attention to the use of metaphor as a source of the sublime (8.1). *Gennaía* refers to nobility by natural birth rather than achievement, and it is metaphor’s birthright to hide in its brilliance. As Longinus points out, the speaker of sublimity “never allow[s] the hearer leisure to count the metaphors, because he too shares the speaker’s enthusiasm” (32.4). Consider the echo then for what it really is — just a metaphor — and our enthusiasm might flatten. The grand conception of thought echoing through space and time is revealed to be a figurative dream. Worse still, Longinus echoes himself: “I wrote elsewhere something like this: ‘Sublimity is the echo of a noble mind’” (9.2). As he unabashedly tries bootstrapping himself into sublimity via self-quotation, we might pause and consider that *megalphrosunes* used ironically means its opposite, i.e., excessive pride. It was used as such by Herodotus to criticize Xerxes — the man who whipped the Hellespont because the water rose against him — for delaying his advance into Greece by digging the Xerxes canal: “to display his power and leave a memorial” (7.24). On the one hand, Longinus’s infusion of self-pride might seem to risk collapsing his argument by revealing behind the grandeur of sublimity a conceited desire to memorialize oneself. On the other hand, Longinus’s figure of the echo still seems to maintain a peculiar force over us, as if the collapse of grand conception coupled with the plunge into the figure’s ironic depths is itself indicative of the sublime experience.

Commentators point to this opposition in Longinus between “*hupsos* [heights/sublimity]” and the revelation of “figurative language” to help articulate how “the brilliance of beauty and grandeur” — what Robert Doran refers to as the “*intensity of affect/effect*” — surrounds the “artifice of the trick,” blinding the reader/listener to that very artifice (Hertz 17; Longinus 17.2; Doran 41, original italics). This opposition is perhaps best put by Hertz, who writes that

when figurative language is concealed it may sustain the truthful, the natural, the masterful, and so on; but when it is revealed, it is always revealed as false. Worse yet ... what is

revealed is not the language's flat-footed falsity but its peculiar agility in moving between the two poles, whether these be named the divine and the human, the true and the false, the position of the father and that of the son, or whatever. (18–9)

Hertz here provides three terms to work with: true, false, and revelation. It is the concealment (falsity) of the figurative language that sustains the truth (*Aletheia*/unconcealment) of the matter, but the revelation of the figurative language does not just conceal what was previously unconcealed. Revelation—a word with rich, affective, apocalyptic resonances—short circuits this either/or distinction through a double truth/unconcealment. Not only does the metaphor of the echo, for example, remain brilliant after its figurative language is unconcealed (insofar as it still seems true to describe citational language as an echo), but also this revelation of figurative language strikes us with all the ironic density Longinus tucked into his own echo's brilliance. This only adds to the sublimity. The truth is that one feels the revelatory power of the figure in both its truth and falsity. We are amazed. Our excitement echoes Longinus's creative moment. The technique of the sublime then is not merely documentation or citation but revelation, which follows a double procedure: first, the arrangement of details which "attracts"; second, the "density" of those details which renews the attraction (Longinus 10.1). Examples of sublimity are appreciated when first heard, and then again in analysis. In fact, the more one analyzes, the more one appreciates.

Hertz argues that Longinus's revelatory discourse produces a "sublime turn": "a transfer of power ... from the threatening forces to poetic activity" (6). He gives the example of Sappho's *fragment 31* to illustrate how poetic power transforms "Sappho-as-victimized-body" into "Sappho-as-poetic-force," and he reads this movement through an example of Homer's "forced combination of naturally uncompoundable prepositions: *hupek*, 'from under'" (Hertz 7; Longinus 10.6). The poetic force of language helps one escape from under the "shattering erotic experiences," just as Homer's sailors are "carried away from under death, but only just" (Hertz 5; Longinus 10.5).¹³ I disagree. The message of the sublime turn is one of no escape: the attempt to master language only leads to further revelation and captivation as analysis transforms into a shattering erotic experience. Sublimity carries us out from under the boiling water and into the fire. Longinus's gambit—as a rhetoric teacher—is that the more he tears apart the truth of poetry, the more ecstatic we will become about its revelation.

4. The Sublime is both Divine and the Human

In the *Republic*, the poets are exiled for being three degrees from the divine. God creates the forms; craftsmen "look towards the appropriate form" to make objects; the artist imitates the objects (596b). Because of this distance, the poet's imitation holds the least amount of knowledge about God and his forms. The ontological criticism of art is the first of three arguments Plato-via-Socrates deploys to accuse poetry of crimes. Poetry's first crime is ignorance. The second is uselessness, and this argument largely depends on the ontological distinctions made in the first: "imitation is an inferior thing that consorts with another inferior thing [the craftsmen's object] to produce an inferior offspring" (603b). The poetic imitation of a bed, Socrates thus explains, has less use-value than the bed itself. Poetry: guilty of both stupidity and uselessness. However, these crimes are not equal to the punishment Socrates seeks. To justify the poet's banishment, Socrates must accuse poetry of what he would be later accused of—corruption of the young.

Socrates corrupts by taking apart language to “make the worse argument the stronger”; but poetry, he claims, corrupts the soul, splitting the rational part of the mind from the irrational, which it “arouses, nourishes, and strengthens,” turning rational, masculine control “womanish” (*Apology* 18c; *Republic* 605b-e). While Plato argues that it might be possible to imitate in art a “rational and quiet character,” this poetry “is neither easy to imitate nor easy to understand when imitated, especially not by a crowd consisting of all sorts of people gathered together at a theater festival” (*Republic* 604e). For the good of the crowd, poetry is banished.

Longinus responds with a bold stroke: “divine writers” produce sublime works because they understand that

nature made man to be no humble or lowly creature, but brought him into life and into the universe as into a great festival, to be both a spectator and enthusiastic contestant in its competition. (35.2)

The poets are exiled for not knowing the nature of things, but in Longinus's view, a poetless city would be unnatural since “It is our nature to be elevated and exalted by true sublimity” (7.2). Longinus here puns on the idea of heights by reconceptualizing the high or sublime style as simply writing that naturally heightens thought rather than a formalized or genre-specific style. By locating the ability to elevate thought in language, Longinus turns Plato on his head. It is not that language corrupts thought but that thought depends on this so-called corruption of language. He deviously quotes from the *Republic* itself to illustrate this point:

Men without experience of wisdom and virtue but always occupied with feasting and that kind naturally go downhill and wander through life on a low plane of existence. They never look upwards to the truth and never rise, they never taste certain or pure pleasure. Like cattle, they always look down, bowed earthwards and table wards; they feed and they breed, and their greediness in these directions make them kick and butt till they kill one another with iron horns and hooves, because they can never be satisfied. (13.1)¹⁴

Playing with Plato's condemnation of poetry for starving the rational and nourishing the irrational, Longinus gives this passage as an example of how “Real sublimity contains much food for reflection” (7.3). The meaning of the passage is clear: men must attend to the rational mind of wisdom and virtue. But the reader feels the energy of this thought through the contempt Plato displays for the mindlessly grazing crowds of cattle. By captivating us with the simile's force, Plato—Longinus implies—slips in the far more impactful metaphor of heightened thought.

Like the *Symposium's* rising stairs, the *Phaedrus's* soaring chariot, or the *Philebus's* heavenly ascent, the *Republic's* allegory of the cave uses metaphorical heights to describe the “upward journey” from the world of shadows into the brilliance of the sun-like “form of the good” (517b). The allegory begins with chained prisoners facing a wall with a fire behind them. People carry figures in front of the fire to produce dancing shadows, and an “echo from the wall” makes the prisoners believe these shadows are real (515b). If someone were freed, says Socrates, and “dragged” from the cave into sunlight, then they would have the blinding experience of gazing upon the form of the good itself (515c). Longinus reveals that behind these sorts of “brilliant finish[es]” in Plato's “philosophical doctrine”—the same metaphorical heights and lights of the Longinian sublime—lay a secret attempt “to compete for the prize against Homer, like a young aspirant challenging an admired master” (13.4). But Longinus's image of Plato's narcissistic *agon* with Homer

is riddled with irony. He prefers to play with the idea of echoes in a cave. Like Pan—who, jealous of Echo's musical gifts and beauty, has her torn "to pieces" and "her limbs" scattered about the whole earth; Plato, jealous of Homer, launches his attack (Longus 84). However, Pan's attack only "scattered her hymns, for she still went on singing"—her songs resounded louder and further than before (Longus 84).

Similarly, Plato's critique, supposedly motivated by the desire to "imitate" Homer's greatness, could only elevate Homer further (Longinus 13.4). For Plato then "To break a lance" against Homer "may well have been a brash and contentious thing to do, but" (in a nod to Socrates's argument against use-value) "the competition proved anything but valueless" (13.4). Longinus's metaphor of the echo responds to Plato's allegory of the cave, solving the problem of requiring an outside force to free the individual and drag them out into the light, thereby demonstrating the value of sublime poetry. The reverberation of sound maps out space, and Longinus implies that it was the echo of Homer's voice that revealed the space of the cave of shadows to Plato. One, therefore, does not need to be forcibly dragged into the light. One need only listen carefully to the echoes in the cave to embark on the upwards journey.

Longinus thus scrambles Plato's formula: instead of using thought to bask in the light of the divine forms of truth/good/beauty, for Longinus "it is indeed true that beautiful words are the light that illuminates thought," (30.2). Or, as Longinus says, in the words of Moses: "'God says'—what?—'let there be light and there was light'" (9.9). Sublimity is then not so much an object but the revelation of language to itself, and through this revelation, the expansion of language's ability to propagate further contemplation. This expansion of thought surpasses Socrates's limited call for the philosopher to be "high-minded enough to study all time and all being" (*Republic* 486a). The enthusiastic expansion of thought through sublime language shows this limitation by demonstrating that "the universe therefore is not wide enough for the range of human thought and speculation" (Longinus 35.3). Before making this statement about all time and being, Socrates remarks that the philosopher ought to be "always reaching out to grasp everything both divine and human as a whole" (486a). Longinus's analysis of Plato's sublimity does precisely this. For Longinus, nature means being enculturated into the divine festival of ever-expanding thought. That Plato received "ridicule" for "getting carried away by a sort of literary madness" demonstrates only the affective, "erratic excellence" of divinely enculturated human "nature" rather than bland craftsmanship (Longinus 32.7, 36.4). When Plato was affected by the festive echo of Homer, his energetic response was thus both human and divine. The erratic construction of *On Sublimity* helps Longinus achieve the same.

Notes

- ¹ Unless otherwise indicated, I use Russell's translation of Longinus's *On Sublimity* in *Classical Literary Criticism*, 2008.
- ² Grube's translation, p. 18.
- ³ See D. A. Russell "Longinus Reconsidered" and D. C. Innes "Longinus and Caecilius: Models of the Sublime" for more on this comparison.
- ⁴ See Halliwell 343 and Porter 576–94.
- ⁵ Hertz translates this as "organize them as a single body," p. 4.
- ⁶ Longinus is our primary source for this fragment. Plato may also be referring to this poem when Socrates mentions Sappho's poetry as superior to Lysias's speech in the *Phaedrus*, 235c.
- ⁷ These translations are from Porter. For a closer reading of the Greek, see Porter pp. 598–600. Alcibiades's speech can be found at *Symposium*, 215a–216c.
- ⁸ Plato's antidote for poetry is exile or *pharmakos*. For more on the relation of *pharmakon* to *pharmakos* in Plato, and the untranslatability of *pharmakon* which can mean potion, poison, and antidote, see Derrida's essay "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Disseminations*, pp. 68–186.
- ⁹ For dates and authorship see D. A. Russell 'Longinus' *On the Sublime*, pp. xxii–xxx, and Malcolm Heath, "Longinus and the Ancient Sublime," pp. 15–6.
- ¹⁰ See Derrida, pp. 158–9.
- ¹¹ Innes translates this as "noble excitement, "Longinus: Unity and Structure," p. 308.
- ¹² From Euripides *Hippolytus* ll. 612.
- ¹³ Homer. *The Iliad*, 15.620–30.
- ¹⁴ *Republic* 586a.

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Shelley's Suicidal Sublime

SHOUVIK NARAYAN HORE

'And I am Death, the destroyer of all; and among future good fortunes,
(I am) that which is the best. Among women (I am) Fame, Prosperity,
Speech, Memory, Intelligence, Fortitude and Forbearance'

– *Bhagavad Gita*, 10.34

A leap inside Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Alastor* shows the reader that the Poem, despite its Wordsworthian allusions being well-chalked out by both literary chroniclers and critics, remains, under all circumstances, a great creation of Individual might and sublimity, as adduced by his biographers as early as 1887.¹ It is probably easier to show Shelley's rejection of the so-called 'life instinct' in much of his prose too, a notable example of which can be found in his well-received *A Philosophical View of Reform* (posthumously published in 1920), where he intelligently shows where and why the life instinct, being bound in Earthly limitations, can never escape moderate to high levels of corruption.² A finer poetic version of this rejection can be found in *Epipsychidion* (p. 1821) – finer in appreciation of Shelley's endeavour to maintain philosophical dispositions in verse. In lines such as

Thou living form
Among the dead! Thou star above the storm! (Jonathan and Jessica Wordsworth ed., pp. 716, ll. 27-28)

And

She met me, stranger, upon life's rough way,
And lured me towards sweet death – (ibid., pp. 717, ll. 72-73)

Followed finally by the exceptional passage that begins with

True love never yet
Was thus constrained. It overleaps all fence –
Like lightning, with invisible violence
Piercing its continents; like Heaven's free breath,
Which he who grasps can hold not; like Death,
Who rides upon a thought, and makes his way
Through temple, tower, and palace, and the array
Of arms. (ibid., pp. 724, ll. 397-404)

One cannot help noticing Shelley's slow transition from the identification of the lady as a dead person walking; she is mathematically sublimated with the dimensions of a "star" as opposed to a dynamical, unstable "storm", residing "above" – giving one of the earliest impressions of a Sublime hierarchy where the Mathematical is bound to take its

place above the Dynamic – a line of thought reserved for a different purpose. This is one way in which Shelley dissociates ‘life-instinct’ in a metaphorical manner within two verse lines only – from the living inanimate to the metaphorical inanimate. In the next, the admission is clear – the female figure detoxifies the horrors of a sublime death. In an effort to “sweeten” death, she leads him to the beautification of sublime death which, ideologically speaking, would be so rough that it would have to be disguised within a ‘holy lie’ – a Nietzschean phrase with multiple connotations. Hence, the preservation of ‘life-instinct’ works itself out in Shelley by introducing beauty within the limitless possibilities of suffering in a sublime death, making it mildly tolerable. In the third quote, it is worked out more subtly. While suggesting that “True Love” is like “Heaven’s free breath” which once taken hold of cannot be held on to, Shelley points at two significant instances: first, if “True Love” has to be metaphorically compared with “Heaven’s free breath”, it *ought* to contain within itself all the agencies that true love in ‘life-instincts’ cannot engulf; if this admission is made, then the theoretical conception of “True love” within the metaphor “Heaven’s free breath” becomes pure admiration (hence Sublime) since nobody who grasps it can hold on to it, partially because the Sublime is an aesthetic concept, and mostly because holding on to the infinite, the limitless and the great is nearly impossible for an indefinite amount of time. Shelley’s mature understanding mixes both agents in verse but makes it a point to communicate the true implications of his theory. The commitment towards an ideal ‘death-instinct’ flavoured with ‘life-instinct’ becomes an excellent platform for Sigmund Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* where he gives a pseudo-scientific version of the properties of each tendency.³ My purpose in this brief essay, post this short overview, is to explore a few limited dimensions of Shelleys’ (Percy Bysshe and Mary Shelley) poetical theory with regards to the Sublime: If the death-instinct were to be admixed with the life-instinct, is this dilution acceptable to the death-instinct which is aware that its revelation is destined to go unrealized? If this were to be the case, does it result in the death-instinct annihilating itself as retribution for its own ‘lack’ for pure pursuit of admiration? Knowing that self-annihilation is never sublime, what is the best way of circumventing the life-instinct in order to continue preserving the ‘holy lie’ of the ‘Death-instinct’?

Shelley’s *Alastor* begins with a revelation of a Poet-narrator whose life, having begun in loneliness, ends in an un-discoursed isolation, or so it seems at first:

There was a Poet whose untimely tomb
No human hands with pious reverence reared,
But the charmed eddies of autumnal winds
Built o’er his mouldering bones a pyramid
Of mouldering leaves in the waste wilderness: -
... He lived, he died, he sung, in solitude. (Fraistat and Reiman ed. *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, ll. 50-54, 60, p. 72)

Several elements in these aforementioned verse-lines are a straightforward product of what Shelley intended to do, stating it explicitly in his *Preface* to the poem.⁴ It might not be difficult to aver why no human hands could rear him; as the *Preface* suggests through the use of mountain and sea metaphors towards the end, his death may have been a direct result of over-indulging in the sublime without the ethical consideration of societal beauty. A complete rejection of men in pursuit of an ideological illusion creates an un-rearing of those men for this ‘Man’, to put it in another way. He may have lived (i.e. engaged in beautiful and biological realities) and he may have sung (engaged in a form

of communication, either with fellow men or with fellow sublime-individuals who may have tried to create a community), but he annihilates himself "in solitude"; in the words of R.D. Havens, "morally he was a suicide" (1100). This is a strange proposition. Does Havens mean that suicide is moral too (besides other moral phenomena), or does he imply that his immoral act, when judged by the moral court of justice, declares that "he was a suicide", meaning that the individual himself was living a suicide much before self-annihilation becomes a workable reality for him?

I digress at this point to an interpretation of suicide and its moral ramifications through the benevolent yet authoritarian philosopher whose influence would leave a mark on the literature of the high Romantics: Immanuel Kant. A careful reading of Section II from Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* provides, in my opinion, a perfect illustration of why the senses ought to kneel before a universal law in order to remain moral, or remain calumniated under the veil of immorality:

Morality is thus the relation of actions to the autonomy of the will, that is, to a possible giving of universal law through its maxims. An action that can coexist with the autonomy of the will is *permitted*, one that does not accord with it is *forbidden*. (4:439, p.46, Tr. And ed. Mary Gregor)

If an act of suicide means an action meant to ameliorate life for an apparent lack of intellectual and sensual motive, Kant would leap at the word "apparent", demonstrating that the apparent does not often provide a faithful reflection of the universal which, despite contrasting claims, continues to be the sole "relation" of maxims with morality. If nothing but the apparent seems to obscure and in the process become real, the disease along with the patient had rather go into a moral exile than commit a moral crime by breaking the chain of which he is not the sole arbiter. Thus, to put it in Kantian perspective, it is forbidden because it is a legitimate attempt at destroying the categorical imperative instead of enforcing it; whereas deference, subversion or deconstruction of this imperative is permitted, destruction is not. When Shelley says in *Alastor*,

Does the dark gate of death
Conduct to thy mysterious Paradise,
O Sleep? (ibid. p.75, ll. 211-13)

Kant would probably allow him to explore the intellectual/spiritual extremities of the question without allowing the violation of the categorical imperative by finding it through self-annihilation. The rhetoric, from a philosophical point of view, does not forbid speculation so long as its consciously "coexists" with Paradise and life while questioning after-life, somnambulism and the mystery of lifelessness (I carefully avoid the word "death" here). In the words of Michael J. Cholbi, "To treat suicide as an occasionally permissible hypothetical imperative, as Hume seems to, is to allow each individual's assessment of their present and future well-being to cancel out rational obligation" (168). As Kant would himself point it out in a lengthy passage from *The Metaphysics of Morals*, sublimity gets the short end of the stick as does morality, if committing suicide were to be permitted.⁵ My concern in this digression does not end here. As I have shown in the note, Kant's "sublime moral disposition" does not terminate – to prove this, one must revert back to the 'Analytic of the Sublime' in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* in order to realise two fundamental methods of objection to self-annihilation. In §29:273, Kant says, "Every affection of the STRENUOUS TYPE (such that is, as excites the consciousness of our power of overcoming every resistance is *aesthetically sublime*, e.g. anger, even desperation (*the rage of forlorn hope but not faint-hearted despair*))" (Tr. James Creed Meredith,

p. 125). The first objection pertains to a universal resistance, transcending the maximum limits of any sensual passion that seeks to imprison the faculty for intellectual and spiritual moderation. This resistance is devised on the categorical imperative of sublime absolutism that dissociates passions at crucial moments of emotional maturity in order to forbid a diabolic passion from envenoming, or in a practical sense, colonizing the higher faculties of the mind, leading the person to self-annihilation. Strenuousness, I surmise, must also help in reshuffling emotional bafflement if the superstructure constituting spirit and intellect can preserve a centrist position on this problem. The other quote from §29:274 invites a different position on the same issue, albeit with a far larger agenda in action:

But even the impetuous movements of the mind – be they allied under the name of edification with the ideas of religion, or, as pertaining merely to culture, with ideas involving a social interest – no matter what tension of the imagination they may produce, can in no way claim to the honour of a *sublime* presentation, if they do not leave behind them a temper of mind which, though it be only indirectly, has an influence upon the consciousness of the mind's strength and resoluteness in respect of that which carries with it pure intellectual finality (the supersensible). (p. 126)

The second fundamental element has more clarity than the first's role of absolute resistance to desperation; it argues for the *telos* of resistance – not as a primary motif, but as a secondary one to “intellectual finality”, understood in terms of a categorical imperative with regards to sublime disposition. The other interesting aspect of this quote is Kant's suggestion that resistance must create an indirect impression upon the observer, the accomplishment of which is possible when the universal law is executed to perfection, and the observer can unearth the dispositions of the mind that circumvents self-annihilation. The supersensible, in simpler words, requires the sensible; the “body [has an] essential role in morality: it is the *condition* for the noumenal self's *presence* in the world, and without it we could exercise neither our noumenal nor our phenomenal freedom in instantiating moral values and acquiring virtue” (Seidler, 450). To sum up, any temperament for self-annihilation during a sublime endeavour must be repressed in full conscience of the universal law; it can be done by dis-engaging with its superstructure, so long as one condition is not betrayed: annihilation itself. If the Sublime were to be offered significant resistance, the subject is bound to sink to a lower level of conscience, the inevitable result of which is a *drive* for self-annihilation, for the sublime can no longer achieve “intellectual finality”. In that case, is there some way, or manner to create an illusion that the Sublime ideology continues to live on – that its death, although real, lives on as a ‘holy lie’?

I revert back to Shelley's *Alastor*. From moving through the sublime realms both ideal and natural, Shelley is enamoured by an Arab maiden who does him “love”, or should one say damage?

From duties and repose to tend his steps:-

Enamoured, yet not daring for deep awe

To speak her love: - and watched his nightly sleep. (p. 74, ll. 133-35)

Observe that the maiden, while serving repast to her so-called Master, is frightfully aware of the sublime (read limitless and infinite) pursuit; this is why it requires “daring” for her to approach the subject more than the man. The awe emerges from her admiration of the man, much like Delilah's awe for Samson, and it makes her realize that his powerful and “deep” death instinct must be seduced into a ‘life-instinct’ without infuriating him – hence the hesitation to “speak her love”, knowing that his pursuit of admiration would

backfire if she attempted to dilute it with love, almost to the point of reckless vengeance. Thus, love approaches admiration in the manner of Satan approaching a sleeping Eve in the guise of a snake – more in the form of a dreamy reality – an illusion. Sadly (yet pleasurably), the scheme manages to vex the Poet and the death-instinct is abandoned for the life-instinct soon after:

He reared his shuddering limbs and quelled
His gasping breath, and spread his arms to meet
Her panting bosom...she drew back a while,
Then, yielding to the irresistible joy,
With frantic gesture and short breathless cry
Folded his frame in her dissolving arms. (p. 75, ll. 183-88)

Notice that the seduction of the subject of “deep awe” is completed by love; life-instinct manages to shake off his sublime slumber, and it embraces the principles of love without realizing the ramifications of the act. A counter-feeling develops in the love-subject too; it must yield to the overwhelming sublimity of the subject. Although it gives birth to what Shelley calls “irresistible joy”, it seems to me to give rise to what could properly be denoted as guilty pleasure, for the simple reason that the unconscious ‘life-instinct’ does not easily yield to the consciously pursued ‘death instinct’ of the poet-subject. The proof of this is the literal disappearance of the maiden without any substantial damage to her, whereas the Poet-subject waits to undergo a massive transformation in several stages – something that Frederick Kirchhoff rightfully calls “not ironic but augmentative” (111). What happens next is fairly predictable as the Poet, now seriously blinded by love, loses track of sublimity altogether, and his self-destructive strategies begin to emerge:

And what am I that I should linger here,
With voice far sweeter than the dying notes,
Spirit more vast than thine, frame more attuned
To beauty, wasting these surpassing powers
In the deaf air, to the blind earth, and heaven
That echoes not my thoughts? (p. 77, ll. 285-90)

Outlining his complaint within a theoretical framework, Shelley, like Samson, has gained a substantial amount of love through the dissipation of almost all powers of admiration vis-à-vis the sublime; his submission results in nostalgic grandeurs which are no match for the true pursuit of the sublime now annihilated through contamination with the ‘life-instinct’ brought him by the Arab maiden. Shelley strategizes the path *he* will take as an act of repentance for relinquishing his sublimity:

A restless impulse urged him to embark
And meet lone Death on the drear ocean's waste; (p. 78, ll. 304-5)

With the death cry that

“I have beheld
The path of thy departure. Sleep and death
Shall not divide us long!” (p. 79, ll. 366-68)

And

By love, or dream, or god, or mightier Death
He sought in Nature's dearest haunt, some bank,
Her cradle, and his sepulchre. (p. 80, ll. 428-30)

I would credit Edward Strickland and Tilottama Rajan with excellent analyses of the deeper theme of *Alastor*.⁶ However, I shall present a different version of Shelley's suicidal sublime through the discourse that I have tried to construct so far: The Poet-narrator's single minded pursuit of admiration for the apocalyptic (also known as the Sublime) causes an intellectual and spiritual exhaustion, taking advantage of which the life-instinct, in the form of the Arab maiden, takes possession of and permanently modifies the objectives of Shelley's original death-instinct. Love, having successfully contaminated the sublime, disappears, leaving the sublime with two survivalist options – the first one that Shelley takes involves the annihilation of the body that became the vessel for contamination, thus ending the already-ended sublime pursuit more abruptly than it should, creating an object where self-annihilation cannot be memorialized in any manner due to forced destruction of the physical vessel without letting go of the original objective that the sublime must be preserved at any cost – even at the cost of ideological illusions, which I have elsewhere called the 'Holy Lie', hinting at a pseudo-factual fact that can be successfully paraded to the masses by padding it with essential truth value acquired through sources that may be mythico-actional, mythico-anecdotal and so on. Those institutions promoting a 'Holy lie' must remain faithful to their ideological commitment to these useful half-truths, drawing a fine line between metaphysics on one hand and dogmas (fed by religious bigotry, fanaticism and inhibitions) on the other. Sacredness is maintained by appraising the validity of a long-drawn or far-fetched truth. Here begins Shelley's second adventure against the anxieties of the same question through *Frankenstein* (1818), which I shall very briefly analyse to convey the hypothesis underneath my line of thought.

Mary (and Percy) Shelley's *Frankenstein* catches up with the forcefully sublimated narrative of *Alastor* towards the end of Volume III, where Victor makes his final attempts at destroying what he had created, with the improper philosophical bent of mind that made him imagine that creations *may* be destroyed. In other words, the need to destroy the existence of an ideological perversity is an attempt to overturn the 'Holy-lie' which is the motto of civilization, undoubtedly. Frankenstein can be understood to be the monstrous death-instinct that Victor is chasing in this life, or die in the process of capturing it. It must be stated in the beginning that Victor Frankenstein and the monster are not different beings; one was a manifestation of the monstrosity of the dynamical sublime (the death instinct that teases towards elusive infinities through acts of ferocity), while the creator tried reconciling with the death-instinct by negotiating with acts entirely precluded from life-instincts. The similarity between both of them, put in an alternative fashion, is the difference between contaminated deathlessness and pure Deathlessness, represented by the sustainability of the monster in extreme temperatures. When the fiend says,

I seek the everlasting ices of the North, where you will feel the misery of cold and frost, to which I am impassive (p. 214, Int. Charlotte Gordon)

The polemic of his "seeking" is advantageous for the readers in the beginning itself; seeking the poles is tantamount to seeking an intellectual isolation drawn from extremities, and spiritual isolation from an ocean of contaminated 'life instincts', forever stuck in the cycle of birth and death. It must be usefully interpreted like this: "I, the undying, the everlasting death instinct, will draw my human creator who must forever fail yet negotiate with me for a sustainable life-instinct within, and must die so that the death instinct created profits in promoting its own version of infinity".⁷ What is expected next is a confession by Victor of the impossibility of negotiation (used here in the sense of a deferred agreement, involving two parties, both unsuitable for permanent balance within

themselves or with each other, being a committed product to their ideological certainties) – where the creation must continue without the creator, no matter how fearful and unsympathetic towards the instinct for life:

During these last days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct; nor do I find it blameable. In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature, and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being... (ibid., pp. 225-26)⁸

To create is to court the death-instinct; courting makes the Creator act Godly which is always ruinous, as Freud points out in *The Future of an Illusion*.⁹ As Shelley himself explains, it was executed in a fit of madness fed with enthusiasm, both being powerful identifiers of the Sublime of which is created a rationale – that is, an idea, and the bearer of an ideology which is bound to strip the creator of its leash and escape with its instinct before the Creator can ever catch up with his creation. This is the final explanation for monstrosity escaping far into the extremities of nature, whereas Victor is laid to rest at the end.

What then is the reliable version of Shelley's Suicidal Sublime, if I may conclude my thesis? Through *Frankenstein*, P.B. Shelley confronts the death-instinct but does not annihilate himself in the same manner as he did in *Alastor*. Instead of death by suicide, the Sublime escapes into the grey area between supreme isolation and natural annihilation. It is an intelligent and infinite deferment of death altogether where the manner of death is rendered elusive completely, creating the necessary ideological illusion that the Sublime, no longer knowable, must be infinite, for there are no ways left to explore the extremities, the natural limits which are stretched by a successful application of the death-instinct. The contaminated (life and death instinct admixed) dies, and the pure death-instinct – inhuman, monstrous and awe inspiring for its resolution in maintaining a fiendish distance from civilization gives proper shape to the Shelley's Suicidal Sublime. The 'Holy-lie' lives on.

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Notes

¹ I shall cite just one example to prove my point, since more is not necessarily better. In *Shelley*, John Addington Symonds does not shy away from demonstrating that "*Alastor* has great autobiographical value. Mrs Shelley affirms that it was written under the expectation of speedy death, and under the sense of disappointment, consequent upon the misfortunes of his early life. This accounts for the somewhat unhealthy vein of sentiment which threads the wilderness of its sublime descriptions" (BooksWay Reprint, 2013) p. 86. Symonds was able to see in 1878, and subsequently in 1887 that there is, in midst the autobiographical element, a disturbing bewilderment that destabilizes the Shelleyan Sublime, if I may put it so. This fracture was conceptual, and Symonds does not get around to asking where the problem lay.

² According to Shelley, "Modern society is thus an engine assumed to be for useful purposes, whose force is by a system of subtle mechanism augmented to the highest pitch, but which, instead of grinding corn or raising water acts against itself and is perpetually wearing away or breaking to pieces the wheels of which it is composed" (Introduction by T.W. Rolleston, OUP, 1920), p. 11. The use of "perpetually" sets the life-instinct into a whirlwind of circumlocutory life-instincts, each so entangled that the overall form gives an illusion of perpetuity in a very systematic, continual, driven, grammatically structured discourse-driven entity.

- ³ "They [sexual instincts] are conservative in the same sense as the other instincts in that they bring back earlier states of living substance; but they are conservative to a higher degree in that they are peculiarly resistant to external influences; and they are conservative too in another sense in that they preserve life itself for a comparatively long period. They are the true life instincts. They operate against the purpose of the other instincts, which leads, by reason of their function, to death; and this fact indicates that there is an opposition whose importance was long ago recognized by the theory of the neuroses" (James Strachey ed. and tr., W.W. Norton reprint, 1975), p. 34. This credit-hawking by Freud does not bode well with Harold Bloom who, in *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, correctly elicits that "psychoanalysis, after all, is only a speculation, rather than a science, a philosophy, or even a religion" (HUP, 1991) p. 146. What Bloom appreciates in Freud is the study that neither instinct is ever entirely predominant – that subservience of one to the other is not the same as surrender – that "the psyche is at civil war, but what it wars with, in itself, is the injustice of outwardness, the defensive disorderings of the drives, the unnecessary sufferings that rob us of the freedom that yet can be our time" (154). Perhaps this is Shelley's "Heaven's free breath", revealed yet unrealized.
- ⁴ "He images to himself the Being whom he loves. Conversant with speculations of the sublimest and most perfect natures, the vision in which he embodies his own imaginations unites all of the wonderful, or wise, or beautiful, which the poet, the philosopher, or the lover could depicture" (69). What is relieving here is that the Poet himself able to see the sublimity in his Poem, a degree of erudition allowing him to perceive it – something that Keats could not in his 'Sublime' odes. There is another interesting aspect in his *Preface*. The Norton edition records Shelley writing that "Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an early grave" (ibid) while Jonathan and Jessica Wordsworth, in *The Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry*, substitute "descends" for "sinks" (p. 87), among other minor changes. Whereas it does not seem to impress any radical change on the readers' mind, I speculate that there is a slight change of imagery; one moves from a mountain metaphor to a sea metaphor. Although both imageries are decidedly sublime, the idea of death in pursuit of a sublime and its essential failure through annihilation of illusionary ideological motives sets the tone for Shelley's suicidal sublime even before the poem proper begins. Norman Thurston's analysis of Shelley's *Preface* in "Author, Narrator, and Hero in Shelley's 'Alastor'" addresses the nature of his resentment well-enough: "If *Alastor* cost him the pains of introspection, and if introspection served only to aggravate the pains of subjectivity, he may have been unwilling to expose his feelings once again when he came to write the *Preface*. Possibly he was content to enter a moral criticism of the Poet's loneliness – and let it go at that" (130). Published in *Studies in Romanticism*, 14:2 (1975): pp. 119-131. 10.2307/25599965.
- ⁵ "Since he must regard himself not only as a person generally but also as a *man*, that is, as a person who has duties his own reason lays upon him, his insignificance as a *human animal* may not infringe upon his consciousness of his dignity as a *rational man*, and he should not disavow the moral self-esteem of such a being, that is, he should pursue his end, which is in itself a duty, not abjectly, not in a *servile spirit* as if he were seeking a favour, not disavowing his dignity, but always with consciousness of his sublime moral disposition (which is already contained in the concept of virtue). And this *self-esteem* is a duty of man to himself" (231). See *TMM*, Part I. (On Duties to Oneself as Such) of 'Doctrine of the Elements of Ethics', Chapter II, 'On Servility' §11:435, p. 230. Introduction and Tr. Mary Gregor. CUP, 1991.
- ⁶ "Most fundamentally, it delineates an anti-mimetic myth of poesis as progressive disincarnation, exclusion from the poetic consciousness of all that is not of its own imagination, a myth that involves us in a series of epistemological inversions in which nature is perceived alternately as projection, a spectre, a void, and finally an apocalyptic complex of all three" (150). This is a near perfect analysis, except for the fact that it stops here, which is a serious problem in assessing the direction a sublime will take in order to maintain its pedagogical illusion of infinity, something that I have undertaken to perform in this essay. Published in *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 33 (1984): pp. 148-160. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30212932>. In 'Narrative and Identity in *Alastor*', Rajan comments that "Lyric is not so much the antitype of narrative as a sublimation maintained only by the absence of narrative" (95). Why this is can be traced to two factors – first, sublimity

requires an actionless action; if the sublime were to move, its sublimity is generally incapable of moving with it; second, Shelley's lyric is deliberately narrated in a Miltonic manner that has been severely critiqued by Samuel Johnson in *Lives of the Poets*. That Shelley used the lyric as an excuse to versify Sublimity should not come as a genuine shock – a concept of proceeding through contradictions that I shall elaborate in a different essay. Published in *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth-Century Views*, edited by G. Kim Blank (Palgrave Macmillan, 1991).

⁷ Joyce Carol Oates sees this interpretation, unbeknownst to Mary and Percy, but especially Percy because the idea behind it is very Alastoresque towards the end: "On the surface, Frankenstein's behaviour is preposterous, even idiotic, for he seems blind to the fact that is apparent to any reader – that he has loosed a fearful power into the world, whether it strikes his eye as aesthetically pleasing or not, he must take the responsibility for it" (546). This is still an oversimplification, but correct nevertheless. See "Frankenstein's Fallen Angel", published in *Critical Inquiry* 10:3 (1984): pp. 543-554. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448261>

⁸ An excellent analysis is made by Frances Ferguson in "The Nuclear Sublime". Apart from the distinction that the monster is a creation and not an invention (8), she opines that "While the sublime courts the feeling of overextension as a version of individual freedom, the social world of the beautiful recoils at the way the notion of individual freedom seems stretched too thin to accommodate its various claimants" (8). This is primarily the difference between the sublime (the preponderating death instinct) and the beautiful (the life-instinct). This tug of war continues between the Creator who wanted to create a death instinct and the created instinct which is too horrifyingly deathly to look at, and is willing to annihilate the creator by forcing him through inhuman extremities while carefully avoiding murder and self-annihilation. Published in *Diacritics* 14:2 (1984): pp. 4-10. 10.2307/464754

⁹ "If men are taught that there is no almighty and all-just God, no divine world-order and no future life, they will feel exempt from all obligation to obey the precepts of civilization. Everyone will, without inhibition or fear, follow his asocial, egoistic instincts and seek to exercise his power; Chaos, which we have banished through many thousand years of the work of civilization, will come again" (James Strachey ed., W.W. Norton and Company, 1961), p. 34. That Victor Frankenstein plays God is also a rejection of God, if understood properly. God having become a 'play' is problematic to reconcile with, even for the one playing God; hence, the collapse of world order in the hands of unregulated creation, here the illusive and ideological sublime given shape, which is infinitely detrimental for having to realize that ideology is the end of everything including ideology.

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BOOK REVIEWS

LATE COLONIAL SUBLIME: NEO-EPICS AND THE END OF ROMANTICISM. By G. S. Sahota. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018. xiv+277 pp.

In Classical and Biblical literature, the term for ending, *Kairos*, imbricates the meanings of origin and closure, the passing and the fulfilled, and conjoins crisis with critique. G.S. Sahota's *Late Colonial Sublime: Neo-Epics and the End of Romanticism* musters a stunning array of figures rarely studied together: Walter Benjamin and Altaf Hussain Hali, Michael Madhusudan Datta and Mohammad Iqbal, Joseph Conrad and Jayashankar Prasad to grasp how the kairotic moment of romanticism sifts in the Imperial periphery: in Urdu, Bengali and Hindi, and crystallizes in the form of "neo-epic". His move across the disparate temporal nodes of texts such as *Musaddas: The Ebb and Flow of Islam*, *Meghnadbadhkavya (The Slaying of Meghnad)*, *Kamayani (The Daughter of Kama)* and even Ramanand Sagar's *TV Ramayana* marks the late colonial as an age of the "simultaneity of non-simultaneous" *pace* Ernst Bloch, and replicates the formal amplitude of the neo-epic¹. The copious epic form revived in the colony in the wake of imperial capital remembers how the commodity form bristles into the garden trope of Indo-Islamic poetry in Hali, or how the Greco-Roman epic is transplanted into the Sanskrit *kavya* in Datta in an age of colonial liberalism. The epic memorialization such events within the formal structures of these texts at the turn of the century goes against the grain of the minimal in metropolitan Modernism. And yet, as Sahota notes, the neo-epics are not dregs of the traditional in a modernizing moment. Neither are they national allegories *pace* Fredric Jameson, he argues.² Rather, they are "quintessentially modern" in their obdurate "antimodernism", simultaneously revealing the imperial ruins and committing to their redressal, perfusing the future in the form of the past (14).

Late Colonial Sublime has two parts. The Part I, "Fractured Frames: Imperial Parallax and Disjointed Time" focuses on the crisis of value experienced under the aegis of imperial capital. Everyday life is reified, driven by the universal value of commodity and its ideologies of utility and progress. Romanticism and the sublime are presented as critical categories that emerge at the same moment of crisis and condense within them possibilities of undoing that history. Chapter 1, "Commodity and Sublimity: Mimesis of the Immaterial" dialectically posits the Marxist categories such as "reification", "fetishism" and "commodity-form" against the romantic category of the "sublime", and creates a theoretically innovative model for grasping "nonsensuous similarity" amid apparently distant and disparate phenomena. Chapter 2, "Romanticism's Horizons or the Transmission of Critique" begins with a brilliant reading of Conrad's *Lord Jim* where

ocean as a category of the romantic sublime focalizes the “immanent contradictions of the imperial order” (57). The illusory ideals of the protagonist become a site of self-reflection for imperialism at large, as subjectivity turns into the allegory of history, a method akin to the work of Jameson, as I elaborate later. A series of quotations from Walter Benjamin is presented as “Oceanic Interludes”, and indeed, ocean emerges as the most pervasive category of the sublime in this book. Chapter 3, “Atmospherics of Imperialism: Benjamin’s Sublime” presents the crux of Sahota’s theoretical maneuver in the book. Benjamin is persuasively credited to be the progenitor of a materialist understanding of the sublime, and that of a revitalized epic remembrance, as I discuss in the next section. Part II, “Neo-Epic Constellation: Out of British India” begins with Michael Madhusudan and ends with Mohammad Iqbal and Jayashankar Prasad, constellating Bengali, Urdu and Hindi traditions of the neo-epic as the paradigmatic genre of the late colonial. Chapter 4, “Hali’s Transvaluation of Modernity: Allegories of *Marsiya*” centers on the scalar disjunction of adapting the classical form of the *Musaddas* to life in Victorian India. The images of shipwreck in the ocean of historical change configure the oceanic sublime as an index of transformation, the torn legacy of Mughal India that would be taken up in subsequent chapters in diverging imaginaries of the nation in Urdu and Hindi, in Iqbal and Prasad. Chapter 5, “Iqbal or the *Sturm und Drang* of Late Colonial India: Resemblances of Pure Content” is elaborated through a close reading of *Javid Nama*, and Iqbal’s copious vision of Islam as assimilation of the Enlightenment, German Romanticism and Bergsonian Intuitionism. The oceanic sublime in the text is refigured as a departure from the formulae of Indo-Islamic poetry, usually confined to the imaginary of the town with topoi such as “garden”, “mosque” or “tavern”. The vision of a redeemed future out of the here and now of late colonial India unleashes the “sublime energy embedded within the mundane existence”, and formulates a break from the Islamic canon (162). This vision, argues Sahota, cannot be contained by Iqbal’s political preferences. He explicates how Iqbal’s *Payam* interlocks with Goethe’s *Divan* in terms of Goethe’s earlier interlockings with Persian poetry, and the ebb and flow of the sublime pulsates across the constraints of history. Chapter 6, “Utility and Culture: Modern Subjectivity and the Neotraditional Aesthetics” moves across Bengali and Hindi to write an intellectual history of utilitarian liberalism in North India in relation to the “neo-epic”. From the post-liberal possibilities of Datta’s *Meghnadbadhikavya* to the neo-conservatism of Prasad’s *Kamayani*, the neo-epic hero turns from the rebel into the new Manu, symptomatic of an age of modern traditionalism, obsessed with progress (*Unnati*) (204-6). The book ends with an “Epilogue”, “Melancholic Ornament: TV Ramayana, Nostalgia and the Kitsch as Counter-Enlightenment” where the immersive sheen of TV, itself a material incarnation of modern commodity culture and mass consumption, is paradoxically presented as the sliding door out of the time of capitalist modernity.

Sahota is careful to avoid a culturalist rhetoric of historical difference in his study, influential in a stripe of academic postcolonialism. The temporal unevenness between the metropole and the colony is diagnosed as the aporia of modernity itself, rather than the waiting room of history for the colonized, to use the famous metaphor from Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000). Instead of thoroughly rejecting the Enlightenment as the imperial reason of Europe, Sahota displaces it onto the colonial geography, and in the writings of Iqbal and Datta among others retrieves its “horizon of egalitarianism”, beyond the confines of imperialism and nationalism. In his constellation of a “postcolonial Marxism”,

the end of romanticism in the colony acquires “dialectical valences”, and reveals the mark of untimely capital even in ostensibly imperial-romantic texts from the metropole, such as Conrad’s *Lord Jim* (56). The global dispensation of romanticism as anti-imperial aesthetics has become an established area of scholarship through the works of Saree Makdisi, Nigel Leask, Javed Majeed, and recently Manu Samriti Chander among others. In discerning the spatial chiasmus of late romanticism across the imperial core and periphery in the nineteenth century, beyond the logics of dissemination and influence, Sahota’s project has a critical affinity with the spatial turn in the study of world literary systems, for instance in the works of Robert Tally Jr. and Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee. However, the remarkable originality of *Late Colonial Sublime* lies in its reinvention of Walter Benjamin as a “late colonial thinker”, in whose adaptation of the Kantian sublime into the constellated fragments of the commodity-form lies the crux of Sahota’s theorization. After Peter Fenves’ *The Messianic Reduction: Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time* (Stanford University Press, 2011) Sahota’s *Late Colonial Sublime* is a substantial engagement with the Kantian legacy in Benjamin. Benjamin’s everyday life [*erlebnis*] in fin de siècle Europe as well as his experience in the island of Ibiza, are persuasively diagnosed to be haunted by the colonial. This refreshing read is contrary to what Jameson famously called the cognitive disjunction between metropolitan lived experience and its colonial substratum in nineteenth century literature, a rift that was broached in the formal experiments of modernism in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). In that sense, the book could be read in tandem with Lauren M.E. Goodlad’s *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty and Transnational Experience* (OUP, 2015) that seeks to decouple realism from the project of hegemonic liberalism. However, Sahota goes beyond the anglophone tradition Goodlad assesses. The parallax structure of his readings undoes the metropolitan-colonial divide in annotating late nineteenth century romanticism, conjoined at the jugged edges of their disjuncture. Here he is arguably positing a thesis akin to Jameson’s *A Singular Modernity* (Verso, 2012) that reads modernism as the protracted ruination and melancholic refiguration of romanticism, where “a radical depersonalization of the bourgeois subject” takes place, and subjectivity becomes allegory of the “transformation of the world itself” (135-6). Sahota connects the romantic sublime of early Benjamin in works such as “The Pan of Evening” and “Estranged Land” with the later Benjamin of technological reproducibility and discarded artifacts to zero on landscape (*landschaft*) as the figure of the natural-historical in his philosophy. In landscape, eroded nature conjoins with cultural tropes of the bygone, pleated in a palimpsest without being harmonized (102-3). Indeed, the romantic landscape in Benjamin becomes mere form, a skeleton of romanticism possessed by the nocturnal intuitions of imperial capitalism. The constellation without harmony makes landscape messianic, a horizon of redemption where the clock of historical onslaught could be halted. The Benjaminian sublime, unlike the Kantian one, is antiteleological. Sahota notes how Benjamin espouses a non-instrumental philosophy of language, in contrast to the Neo-Kantianism of his day. Here it is not chiseled with human will, as in Neo-Kantianism. Rather, it prefigures social totality, absorbs the subjective “I” in its magic, and coagulates “the givenness of raw *phusis* and the innateness of human *poiesis*” (114). Coupling memory of an eroded totality and prefiguring a not-yet wholeness, Benjamin in his travel accounts of Ibiza, the astonishing essay called “The Storyteller” and his engagement with Brecht’s epic theatre develops an estranged faculty of the epic. It retains the critical awareness of (re)membrance, shreds strewn together in neo-epic, carefully eschewing the racialization

of memory couched in a fascist return to roots. The complex notion of remembrance (*eingendenken*) emerging initially through Benjamin's reading of involuntary memory in Proust, as distinguished from voluntary memory, is crucial to his philosophy of history, a point presented a bit obliquely by Sahota.³ Indeed, the politics of past typified in these two forms of memory directly maps into the distinction between critical sublime of the neo-epic and romantic mystique of fascism. The blurring contours of this distinction in the early decades of twentieth century is a running concern of Sahota, a predicament examined carefully in relation to Rabindranath Tagore's visits to Italy and Japan (88-92). The dangerous possibility of being trapped into the neo-conservative politics of roots is coeval with the birth of the neo-epic, and it would only enhance in post-colonial India. The epilogue about the *TV Ramayana* presents the overlaps between an imaginary organic "Aryan" community, and the massification of the public sphere. It is the crucible of a "conservative revolution", in the words of the anthropologist Thomas Blom Hansen, as Sahota cites (218). It is an "epic visuality", a suspension of history, where new modes of historiography could be forged to remove the estrangement of remembrance, and make memory of the nation homogenous (231).

Late Colonial Sublime is truly remarkable in its breadth and sharpness of insight. Perhaps the only missing link between the postliberal impulses of neo-epic as it was forged in Madhusudan and Hali and its neo-conservative form in *TV Ramayana* is the Orientalist archive in British India that intercepts access to tradition in postcolonial India, and spawns kitsch of the past. Nevertheless, the book is remarkably original and ambitious, and promises sustained relevance across the fields of Romanticism, World Literature, South Asian Studies, Postcolonial Studies and Aesthetic Theory.

Notes

¹ See Ernst Bloch, "Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics", *New German Critique*, no. 11 (Spring 1977) pp. 22-38.

² Fredric Jameson's essay "Third-World Literature in the Age of Multinational Capitalism", *Social Text* No. 15, (Autumn, 1986) pp. 65-88, has courted controversy since Aijaz Ahmad's lashing rebuttal, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory", *Social Text* No. 17 (Autumn, 1987), pp. 3-25. Often cited as an exemplar of first-world parochialism of a master theorist, Jameson's essay mobilizes the resources of world-system theory to focalize the periphery as a site politico-aesthetic subversion. An important recent attempt to resuscitate Jameson's relevance in the study of World Literature, based on the essay is Auritro Majumder's "The Case for Peripheral Aesthetics: Fredric Jameson, World-System and Cultures of Emancipation", *Interventions: International Journals of Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 19, 2017, pp. 781-796.

³ For a comprehensive account of the distinction between involuntary memory and voluntary memory see the chapter on "Remembrance" in Eli Friedlander's *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait* (Harvard University Press, 2012).

STEPPING WESTWARD. By Nigel Leask. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. xiii+339 pp.

In his 'Introduction' to the Book, Leask, through William Wordsworth's poem 'Stepping Westward' (p. 1805), argues the consequences arising from the interaction between the touristic community of Southerners and the economically backward North, giving birth to the earliest examples of what could be called 'pedestrian aesthetics' and 'the tourist sublime', which Leask defines as "'a human sweetness' that permits Wordsworth to humanize the cosmic uncertainty" (5). Theoretically speaking, the 'tourist sublime' seems to be a triumvirate between 'human sweetness' fading as nature dis-suits itself from further clear-cut definitions *in* time, "cosmic uncertainty" which prevails as the apocalyptic, or the 'true' imaginative timelessness sets in, and their dialectical balance whose slow but steady attrition marks the domain of the Sublime.¹ 'Old Ways and New Roads' provides an insight into Edmund Burt's *Letters* on the topography of Scottish Highlands, illustrating the quirky instincts of the Highlanders who participated in "sullen non-cooperation rather than linguistic incompetence" (40) with the tourists. 'Conquering Caledonia' introduces, among other things, Michael Hughes's *A Plain Narrative* (1746) and *A Journey* (1747) by an anonymous author who charts his dislike for the mountains in a manner similar to Burt's. The author, in the midst of broad historicizations, highlights the diabolic side of MacPherson's *Ossian* which "sutured Highland and Lowland identity in creating an integrated national *mythelhistoire* for Scotland within the Union" (81), hinting at cultural homogeneity not emerging from cultural monopolizations, but from acknowledging cultural individualities and politicizing homogeneity through individualized heterogeneity across cultures. 'Thomas Pennant's Highlands' charts the itineraries of the eponymous character and surveys his publications, while the succeeding chapter studies Dr Samuel Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775), interestingly pointing out how "he [Johnson] seems to be energized into inner creativity by the sensory 'blockage' of the surrounding mountains" (148), or how Johnson's true aim was not to absorb the Scottish Highlands, but to create a 'noble distance' from the material urbanity of the lowlands, using the Highlands as a perceptive gestalt.² Johnson's wish to "formalize Gaelic" (163) by drawing it away from its orality and improving it through print has been well presented and equally well-argued. In 'Inhabited Solitudes', the author foregrounds the picturesque in the works of William Gilpin, John Stoddart and Sarah Murray, finally assessing Dorothy Wordsworth's *Recollections of a Tour made in Scotland* (1803) where she "employs memory and imagination to recover lived experience" (198). The aesthetic subject in Dorothy is "self-effacing", which marks a decisive move in the female approach to pedestrianism. Leask demonstrates the *Ossianic* in Wordsworth's 'Solitary Reaper', claiming how he "creates a kind of parity across huge barriers of language, gender, class and culture, at least in aesthetic if not in socio-political terms, but without any suppression of the latter" (216).³ In 'Walter Scott and the Highland Tour', the author projects the sources of Scott's 'The Lady of the Lake' (1810) in the appropriation of "Pennantian travel account" (233) to his own purposes. In the concluding chapter, Leask addresses the implications of William Daniell's *Voyage Round Great Britain* (1814-25) that introduces the phrase 'moral electricity' in the domain of tourist aesthetics. He

correctly points out how “steam transport was a democratizing force” (264), meaning its absolute lack of discrimination between humankind by substituting them with mechanical enterprises. John Eldowes Bowman’s *The Highlands and Islands* (1825) notes “not just an emerging distinction between ‘traveller’ and ‘tourist’, but also the significance of reading as a preparation (rather than a substitute) for experience” (267). Drawing readers into Keats’s influential letters written from or about the Scottish highlands, the author notes how “sublime landscape of the kind which tourists drooled over assumes a sexual life of its own” (274) – the term ‘tourist sublime’ re-emerging in the phraseology of the author. MacCulloch’s books on travel writing become a staple for “scientific masculinity” (288). Nigel Leask’s book is a crucial factual repository for researchers studying the motifs of pedestrian aesthetics and its minimal spiritual surplus, suggested through the ‘tourist sublime’.

Notes

- ¹ Citing a passage from Hegel’s conception of God in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe affirms that it is a “‘dialectical’ understanding of the sublime”, but “It is in no way, however, the “dialectical version” or the “dialecticization” of the sublime” (22). Lacoue-Labarthe, in the manner of Hegel, accepts the dialectical roots of the Sublime without calling the dialectical Sublime, or by gainsaying the indebtedness of the Sublime to dialectical (dis) balance. See “Sublime Truth” (part I), published in *Cultural Critique* No. 18 (1991), pp. 5-31. *JSTOR*, 10.2307/1354093. Trans. David Kuchta.
- ² Usual questions aside, one is still inclined to ask if material urbanity amounts to an established femininity aided by channelization of masculine energy that fertilizes it in ways not necessarily physical. The evocation of anything opposite to civilizational discipline must be masculine discipline and not anti-feminine indiscipline. Thus, if Johnson the tourist experiences blockage, it is the blockage of civilizational fluidity and the ingress of stunted, masculine, glaciated movement which, although emaciating if pursued for long, becomes a milestone for future preservation of higher values in fluid civilizational corruptions. As William Cronon puts it, for the sublime myth to sustain, “the mountain [is revealed] as cathedral” (12) despite posing “spiritual danger and moral temptation” (10) – danger since annihilation of the self becomes an obsession both moral and spiritual. See “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature”, published in *Environmental History*, Vol. 1 No. 1, 1996, pp. 7-28. *JSTOR*, 10.2307/3985059.
- ³ The question of suppression often brings a more important question to the fore – is there, in reality, no suppression at work when the aesthetic conflicts with the socio-political, and then un-conflicts with it? I speculate there must be. If the aesthetics of the Sublime must be involved, its political ideas are surely determined by the nature of its action, or by withdrawal from essential non-action. As Donald E. Pease puts it, a formulation must be “able to show what the Sublime “does” much more capably than he can define what the sublime “is”” (260), and since the Sublime “unsettles every locus of power” (263), there is every possibility that subservience is observed at some point of its re-formulation. See “Sublime Politics”, published in *boundary 2*, Vol. 12 no. 3 – Vol. 13 no. 1, On Humanism and the University 1: The Discourse of Humanism, 1984, pp. 259-279. *JSTOR*, 10.2307/302817

JOURNALS RECEIVED

The British Journal of Aesthetics, Comparative Literature, New Literary History, Poetics Today, Philosophy and Literature, Critical Inquiry, Journal of Modern Literature, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism

The *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* (ISSN 0252-8169) is a quarterly peer-reviewed academic journal published by Vishvanatha Kaviraja Institute, India since 1977. Vishvanatha Kaviraja, most widely known for his masterpiece in aesthetics, *Sahityadarpana* or the Mirror of Composition, was a prolific 14th-century Indian poet, scholar, and rhetorician.

The Institute was founded by Prof. Ananta Charan Sukla (1942-2020) on 22 August 1977, coinciding with the birth centenary of renowned philosopher, aesthetician, and art historian, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), to promote interdisciplinary studies and research in comparative literature, cultural theory, aesthetics, philosophy and criticism of the arts, art history, and history of ideas. He edited and published the journal for over 40 years as the founding editor.

The journal is committed to comparative and cross-cultural issues in literary understanding and interpretation, aesthetic theories, and conceptual analysis of art. It also publishes special issues on critical theories of current interest. It has published the finest of essays by authors of global renown like René Wellek, Harold Osborne, John Hospers, John Fisher, Murray Krieger, Martin Bucco, Remo Ceserani, J B Vickery, Menachem Brinker, Milton Snoeyenbos, Mary Wiseman, Ronald Roblin, T R Martland, S C Sengupta, K R S Iyengar, V K Chari, Suresh Raval, S K Saxena, Gordon Epperson, Judith Lochhead, Charles Altieri, Martin Jay, Jonathan Culler, Richard Shusterman, Robert Kraut, T J Diffey, T R Quigley, R B Palmer, Keith Keating, and others. Some of these celebrated essays have been published by Routledge in book format.

The journal is indexed and abstracted in the MLA International Bibliography, Master List of Periodicals (USA), Ulrich's Directory of Periodicals, ERIH PLUS, The Philosopher's Index, CNKI, WorldCat Directory, PhilPapers, EBSCO, ProQuest, Literature Online, Gale (Cengage), ACLA, Academic Resource Index, J-Gate, United States Library of Congress, and the British Library. It is also indexed in numerous university (central) libraries, state and public libraries, and scholarly organizations/ learned societies databases.

Celebrated scholars of the time like René Wellek, Harold Osborne, Mircea Eliade, Monroe Beardsley, John Hospers, John Fisher, M H Abrams, John Boulton, and many Indian and Western scholars had been members of its Editorial Board.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO A SUSTAINING FUND

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ASKING AND ANSWERING THE SUBLIME QUESTION Visions, Views, Vitalities

One of the reasons why the Sublime has remained submerged while other branches of aesthetics have flourished throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century could be its theoretical ‘ungraspability’, if we are permitted to use the word. It remains ungraspable because it has been historically understood to be antagonistic to something more theoretically stable and reflectively concrete as the beautiful, not to mention the trajectory that the Sublime has had to chart from being a concierge of divine metaphysics to being an ‘inside-out’ metaphysical abnormality. To cite an example, when Longinus says: “Sublimity raises us towards the spiritual greatness of God”, one is bound to enquire the concreteness of ideas like “spiritual”, “greatness”, “God”, the relationship between this triad and “raising”, and if this “us” implies that the atheistically-driven human cannot experience the Sublime, or if Sublimity extirpates everything that does not believe in God as in-human, or as “not” us. On the contrary, Barnett Newman’s *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (“Man, Heroic and Sublime”), apart from being massive in size and devastating in effect, promotes an intelligent paradox, if I may tweak Lyotard’s critique of his painting: the ‘Present-ness’ of sublime metaphysics. This disturbingly huge theoretical playground contends something acute: Is there a way of explaining away the elusiveness of the sublime? This is not a question that this volume seeks to answer; instead, it seeks to elaborate the possibilities of a theoretically sound question, or a set of questions that can be posed to better understand sublime elusiveness rather than explaining it away. To put it in another way, the need for promoting a framework that explains obscurity without explaining it away – the necessity of paradoxical ontologies as opposed to paradoxes answered is the first and only objective of this volume on the Sublime.

The essays in this volume cover a wide range of areas associated with the Sublime – from Longinian theory, to sports, translations, music, paintings and Freudian interpretations, it fulfils the contemporary requirements of the Sublime in the twenty-first century:

The Classical and the Romantic sublime – an interdisciplinary approach; Music, Painting, Architecture and Photography – theorizing sublimities; Sublimating the Picturesque paradox; Harold Bloom’s ‘The American Sublime’ and ‘The Sceptical Sublime’ – Reading De-constructively; 19th century Continental philosophy and literature – Phases and Discourses on the sublime; The Psychoanalytic Sublime – subliminal, subliminalities and ideology; The psychology of the Unconscious and the Apocalyptic with regards to the Sublime; Scientific, Moral and Absurd sublimities in marginalized literatures of the world; Indic Scriptures, Philosophies, Epics and the theorizations of an ‘Indian Sublime’ in the 21st century.

Shouvik N. Hore